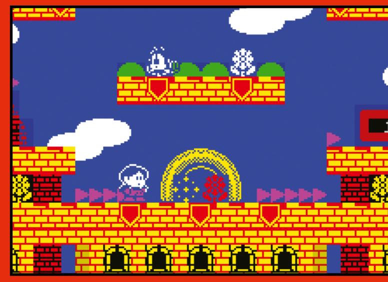
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THE 35 GAMES THAT HAVE DEFINED THE MACHINE FOR EACH YEAR OF ITS LIFE

MEDAL OF HONOR

THE DECLASSIFIED REPORT ON EA'S WORLD WAR II BLOCKBUSTER SERIES

PC Engine

Import Icon

Discover how NEC's miniature console made the west green with envy



Also inside

- SONIC MANIA
- SUNSET RIDERS
- GAME GEAR
- JET SET RADIO
- ROD-LAND
- PHOENIX



SURVIVING NIGHT TRAP

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SEGA'S CONTROVERSIAL FMV ODDITY

11 ATARI ST ESSENTIALS

OBSCURE GEMS THAT MADE THE 16-BIT HOME COMPUTER SING

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE SPECTRUM GAME?



DARRAN JONES

It will always be *Sabre Wulf* for me. It's the *Dark Souls* of Spectrum games.

Expertise:
Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine

Currently playing:
Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon

Favourite game of all time:
Strider



NICK THORPE

Deflektor is on other systems too, but I first played Gremlin's excellent puzzle game on the Spectrum and that's the platform I'll always associate it with.

Expertise:
Owning five Master Systems (I sold two)

Currently playing:
Sonic Mania

Favourite game of all time:
Sonic The Hedgehog



DREW SLEEP

R-Type on the Spectrum is astounding. There must have been dark rituals involved; actual magic, you know?

Expertise:
Creating the Optimum Playing Distance(™).

Currently playing:
Persona 5

Favourite game of all time:
Final Fantasy VIII



SAM RIBBITS

Pass.

Expertise:
Pixels

Currently playing:
Life is Strange: Before The Storm

Favourite game of all time:
Croc: Legend Of The Gobbos



JASON KELK

I have fond memories of *Chronos* from 'back in the day' and enjoy picking it up for a blast once in a while.

Expertise:
Being a homebrew hero

Currently playing:
Wheelin' Wally

Favourite game of all time:
Io



GRAEME MASON

Crikey… that's akin to choosing your favourite child. Erm, erm… I'll go with *Chaos* but ask me again next week and it'll be something else.

Expertise:
Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver

Currently playing:
Dying Light

Favourite game of all time:
Resident Evil 4



PAUL DRURY

A tie between *Jetpac* and *Manic Miner*, though if we're talking a Speccy exclusive, I'll say the charming and experimental *Knot* in 3D.

Expertise:
Codswallop

Currently playing:
WipEout: The Omega Collection

Favourite game of all time:
Sheep in Space



MARTYN CARROLL

Jet Set Willy. Exploring Miner Willy's mansion is one of my earliest and fondest gaming memories.

Expertise:
Sinclair stuff

Currently playing:
The Witness

Favourite game of all time:
Jet Set Willy



LOADING...



I always wanted to own a PC Engine and I've always wanted to put it on the cover of **Retro Gamer**. It's the first ever games machine that I truly coveted, and the first that felt truly special to me as a youngster. I'd seen the screenshots of *R-Type* in the likes of *CVG* and the quality of the graphics made me giddy with excitement. We once screamed 'Arcade Perfect' on the cover of **Retro Gamer** when we featured the Neo-Geo, but I'd argue that the tagline was also suitable for NEC's delightful console, particularly when it was placed up against the 8-bit and 16-bit home computers of the time.

So this month, we've spoken to the people who were on the frontlines when NEC's console first arrived, those that were telling us about this wondrous new console, which sadly never made the impact here that it made in its native Japan. I would go on to own both a PC Engine and the excellent GT handheld model but, like an idiot, I sold them on. If you are tempted to pick up a PC Engine after reading our cover feature then I implore you not to make the same mistake as me.

I also implore you to read the excellent edition of **Super Play** that has been resurrected for a special one-off issue this month. It's been lovingly put together by many of the original members and is an excellent companion piece for the incoming release of the SNES Mini. And who knows? If this issue is well received there's always the chance we'll return to the Future vaults and revisit more classic mags.

Enjoy the magazine(s)!

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>> Load 172 Breathing new life into classic games

RETRO RADAR

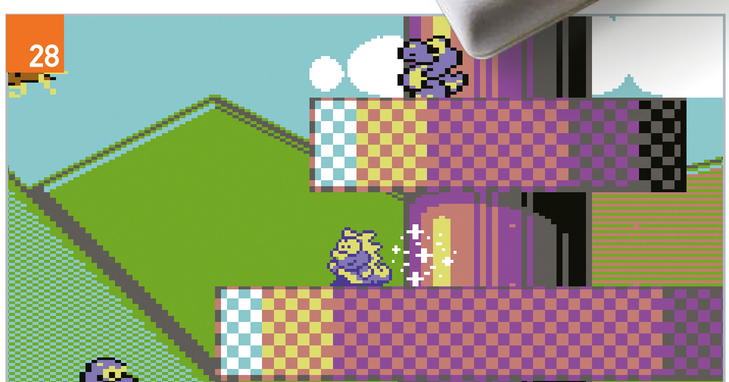


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"We had been taken over by the EA machine, and there was a huge downslope at that point"

REVIEWS

ESSENTIALS



✱ CONTENTS

> **"We also started working with Bandai Namco this year"**
> Yada Khoongumjorn

FLASHBACK STRIKES BACK

AtGames reveals brand-new hardware for 2017

AtGames is one of the most prolific manufacturers of plug-and-play retro consoles, with more than a decade of experience in the sector and two major long-term licensing deals with Atari and Sega. While the company has traditionally made minor tweaks to its offerings annually, this year it's introducing brand-new hardware with more modern features. To find out more, we spoke to AtGames' product coordinator Yada Khoongumjorn.

AtGames has had heavier competition over the past year than it has experienced in the past, and this year you're marketing a new range of hardware with lots of improvements. How much of that is as a reaction to increased competition in the sector?

I would say that it's not so much due to the increased competition as due to the increased exposure to the space, if that makes sense. AtGames has been manufacturing officially licensed Atari and Sega consoles for many years – our Sega line has been going on since 2005 – so we have always known that this is something that lots of people are interested in, something that people love to purchase for themselves, for their husbands and wives, to show retro games to their kids. We made some changes to our lineup this year and elsewhere in the business in response to the increased exposure, definitely.



» [Mega Drive] HDMI output ensures that games like *Sonic The Hedgehog* look better than ever.

What are the key new features of the Atari Flashback 8 Gold and Sega Genesis Flashback this year?

We have a new premium line, in addition to the normal line we produce every year, for both the Sega Genesis and the Atari 2600. These premium consoles feature more modern features, such as HDMI output, which is something that people have been asking for – for a while, actually. They feature 2.4GHz wireless controllers – frankly, I know that the ones in the past just didn't work very well, they were infrared and these are not. They feature vastly improved sound on the Sega, the wrong pitch on the previous consoles does not exist on the new consoles, and on the Atari we have a selection of new games, mainly from Activision.



» The presentation of the Atari Flashback is nice and slick. The Nintendo influence is clear.

The Atari Flashback 8 Gold comes in two models – a regular edition and an Activision edition. What's the difference?

The Activision edition of our Atari console is done in very close partnership with Activision, they've actually never done anything in the retro console space before, even though they have such a big library. The difference is the normal Atari Flashback 8 Gold has 20 Activision games, and then it also has a couple of others like Taito's *Space Invaders* and Konami's *Frogger*. The Activision edition only has Atari first-party, and then 39 Activision games.

With the Genesis Flashback, you mentioned that the sound has been vastly improved. That's something that the classic gaming community has recognised as a problem with the old hardware for some time – why has it taken until now to fix it?

I believe a large part of it comes down to increased exposure creating the incentive to tackle this issue. I'm a relatively new hire, and it's definitely





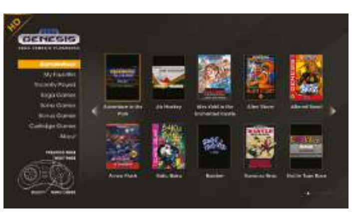
part of a larger strategy of AtGames in modernising what we've been doing for so long. I think when Nintendo came out [with the Nintendo Classic Mini: NES], it was part of making retro gaming more mainstream, and in the same way we as a company decided to move in that direction as well.

A number of early reviews of the Sega Genesis Flashback went up, and they weren't great. AtGames put out a statement that the initial review units were faulty, and that was down to outdated firmware. Is that correct?

Correct. It was outdated firmware, it was a number of mistakes that we made with that initial batch. Those units are in no way representative of what will be going out to retailers at the end of September.

The two complaints in the reviews were poor wireless control response and stuttering. Will both of those issues be fixed?

Correct, as well as a number of others – it was a pretty severe rollback in the firmware. I'll speak frankly, I don't know which reviews you saw, but some of them were also speaking about the power switch – that's not representative of what we're putting out at all, either.



» The roster of Mega Drive games misses a few classics, but it otherwise surprisingly good.



» [Atari 2600] Darran's looking forward to taking *Dig Dug* everywhere with him! [Ed – no he definitely isn't!]

Are the non-premium range consoles – the Atari Flashback 8 and the Sega Genesis Classic Game Console – are they using the same hardware and emulation that was used in previous years?

They are. So what we call the value line, which is the same as previous years, is all the same emulation and all the same hardware. The premium line is, as you've surmised, completely new emulation.

The handheld editions of the machines for this year both feature Namco games which aren't available on the home models – why is that?

In addition to Activision we also started working with Bandai Namco this year. If what you're asking is why we have *Pac-Man* on the portables but not on the consoles, just like everything else it purely comes down to licensing. You'll see some of the Namco titles on other systems, and that doesn't mean that we're never going to have them, but this year we decided just the portables would be a good entry point for this. ✱

» As well as Sega's games, the Sega Genesis Ultimate Portable Game Player includes *Rolling Thunder 2*, *Pac-Panic* and other Namco games.

THE FULL RANGE

Get up to speed on the details of AtGames' 2017 product range…

Atari Flashback 8 Gold

PRICE: $79.99

- 120 built-in games (130 in Activision Edition)
- Two 2.4GHz wireless controllers
- Two control ports
- 720p HDMI output
- Optional scanline filter
- Save/pause/rewind feature for all games





Atari Flashback 8

PRICE: $59.99

- 105 built-in games
- Two wired controllers
- Two control ports
- Standard definition composite AV output

Atari Flashback Portable Game Player

PRICE: $59.99

- 70 built-in games
- 2.8 inch LCD display
- SD card slot for additional games
- TV output via standard definition composite AV





Sega Genesis Flashback

PRICE: $79.99

- 85 built-in games
- Cartridge port for additional games
- Two 2.4GHz wireless controllers
- Two control ports
- 720p HDMI output and scanline filter
- Save/pause/rewind feature for all games

Sega Genesis Classic Game Console

PRICE: $59.99

- 81 built-in games
- Cartridge port for additional games
- Two wired controllers
- Two control ports
- Standard definition composite AV output





Sega Genesis Ultimate Portable Game Player

PRICE: $59.99

- 85 built-in games
- Save game support
- 2.8 inch LCD display
- SD card slot for additional games
- TV output via standard definition composite AV

TEMPEST ON THE HORIZON

ATARI AND JEFF MINTER TEAM UP FOR A NEW GAME

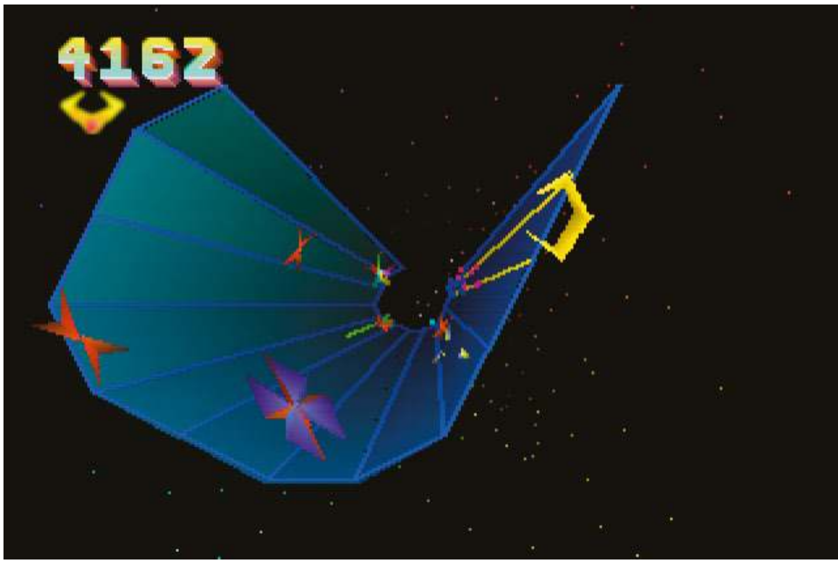
Few developers have had as many ups and downs as Jeff Minter has. One minute he's riding high with the critical acclaim for his awesome shoot-'em-up *TxK*, the next he's receiving lawsuits from Atari wanting to quash said game. It meant that the planned PlayStation 4 and PC builds that Jeff had been working on never received a release, meaning a great many gamers missed out on his excellent shooter. That was in 2015, and a list of demands from Atari that Jeff Minter published on his site (and has since taken down) highlighted that Jeff knew he wouldn't have been able to battle the lawsuit.

Fortunately, it would appear that time is a great healer, as both Atari and Jeff have announced they are working together on *Tempest 4000*, a brand-new game in the classic series. "At the end of the day, videogamers always win," revealed Jeff is a new press release. "I am very happy to work with Atari again to bring the long-awaited sequel of *Tempest* to our legion of fans and a new generation of gamers worldwide."

While it's looking highly unlikely that *Tempest 4000* will be featuring a VR mode, Atari is promising 4K resolution visuals, 100 unique levels and a suitably retro-inspired soundtrack. It's also going to be possible to play an enhanced version of the original *Tempest* as well, which pleases us.

"The original *Tempest* is a beloved arcade classic with a unique style and intense, edge-of-your-seat gameplay," revealed Atari's CEO, Todd Shallbetter. "We're thrilled to be able to work with Jeff Minter again, someone who is a legend in the industry and has made a huge impact on the history of videogames, to develop this highly-anticipated next instalment of the *Tempest* franchise, updated with today's technology."

There's no news on when *Tempest 4000* will be released, but it will be reviewed in a future issue of **Retro Gamer**. Hopefully, Jeff Minter will be able to reveal a little more information in the coming months. *



» [Jaguar] Expect the incoming *Tempest 4000* to be just as searing on your retinas as *Tempest 2000* and *Tempest 3000* were.



» [PS Vita] Jeff Minter's superb *TxK* remains one of the Vita's best shooters. We'd love a physical release.

> "Tempest is a beloved classic with a unique style and intense, edge-of-your-seat gameplay"
>
> Todd Shallbetter

NEW N64 CONTROLLER ANNOUNCED

HERE'S AN EXCUSE NOT TO RENEW YOUR TRIDENT

Retro Fighters recently announced a brand-new controller for the N64 and it's already annihilated its Kickstarter target. Rather than build around the infamous pronged 'trident' design of the original pad, Retro Fighters has instead based its new build on the Classic Controller range that Nintendo has made for its more recent consoles. The new design also adds Turbo and Clear buttons in addition to those found on the original pad. It will be 100 per cent compatible with original memory cards and Rumble Paks and backers are expected to receive their pads within 12 weeks of the project being funded.

Retro Fighters only wanted $13,000 to complete funding, but it appears that there's a lot of interest in the new pad and it currently sits on a total of $114,747 with 24 days to go. While we like the look of the new design, we're concerned that the $20 asking price might be a little too low to create the quality product that's being promised. It's also worth noting that many N64 games were purposely built around the original controller, which could affect gameplay. Needless to say, we'll have more information once the controller is finally made available.



» [N64] It will be interesting to see how games like *Sin & Punishment* play with the new controller.




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Sonic The Hedgehog: 1991-2016

It's a good time to be a *Sonic* fan, as this belated 25th anniversary art book joins *Sonic Mania* in evoking memories of the Blue Blur's best days. This book features just about everything a fan could desire, from familiar artwork, such as game covers and in-game sprites to preproduction sketches and concept artwork – much of which hasn't been seen before. Interviews with key staff members give insight into the design choices made over the last 25 years, and the presentation is enhanced with foldout and transparent pages. The book covers the whole series, but is heavier on the early games due to their introduction of key characters and concepts.

There's also a lavish Collector's Edition, which includes an outer box, an inner sleeve which folds into a book stand, and an art print from Yuji Uekawa which shows Sonic in his three different incarnations.

Price: £40.00 (Collector's Edition £95.00)
From: candb.com

PICK OF THE MONTH

Altered Beast soundtrack

Although the Mega Drive version of *Altered Beast* was popular due to its status as the machine's first pack-in game, we're surprised that Data Discs has opted to go with this version for a soundtrack release instead of the original arcade music. The usual high-quality production applies, though, with a printed inner sleeve and art poster accompanying the record.

Price: £19.99 **From:** data-discs.com



Fighting Fantasy: The Port Of Peril

You know the deal with *Fighting Fantasy* – the gamebooks popular in the Eighties and Nineties have you create a hero, then choose your own path through an adventure, flicking back and forth through the book to find the next section. This is Ian Livingstone's first new *Fighting Fantasy* since 2012's *Blood Of The Zombies*, celebrating the 35th anniversary of the classic series.

Price: £6.99
From: waterstones.com

SmartBoy

If you've got a library of Game Boy cartridges kicking around but your hardware's a bit knackered, why not try the SmartBoy? The USB Type-C accessory gives your phone a cartridge port and physical controls, allowing you to enjoy the classics with modern display technology. We're using it with a Google Pixel here, but it's officially only designed for Samsung phones.

Price: £59.99 **From:** funstockretro.co.uk

PlayStation Hoodie

There are few symbols more recognised in the gaming world than the classic PlayStation logo – it's been visible for over 20 years and on six different platforms. So why not wear it across your chest? This hoodie lets you do exactly that, throws the Japanese text for PlayStation in too, and keeps you warm while doing all of that.

Price: £40.00
From: insertcoinclothing.com



BIO

NAME: Jamie Monk

ESTIMATED VALUE: £2,500 - £3,000

FAVOURITE GAME: *Wonder Boy* on Sega Master System

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

HALO HELMET

■ "The Jewel of my collection is a limited edition *Halo 3* Spartan helmet. I think it's so cool, so well made and I got it in mint condition for a pretty good price too!"

PAID: £20

Attic Attack

Readers take us through the retro keyhole

Unlike many of our collectors, reader Jamie Monk isn't too fussy when it comes to how he amasses his game collection. "To me, a game is a game. Whether it comes with or without a manual, or a perfect untouched disc. As long as it's playable," he tells us. "A lot of the time I pick up games from local car boot sales and charity shops without spending hardly anything. The downside is that they aren't always perfect condition, but that's okay because I like playing the games, not admiring the cases!"

It's a refreshing attitude to take and it's one that makes a lot of sense, particularly when you consider how difficult it is to find cardboard cases in great condition and the high prices they inevitably command. For Jamie, the biggest thing that's always held him back in the past wasn't the condition of the games he chose to collect, but where he would actually keep them. "I've been an avid gamer all my life, but have never had the space to create a games room and really go to town with collecting," he continues. "Since buying my own house two years ago, I've converted the attic into a games room, which has allowed me to hit retro collecting hard." The finished product looks fantastic and it's clear its creation was a labour of love for Jamie. "It took me four months to convert the attic into a room," he recalls. "To begin with it was full of dust and insulation, manned by beams. It was pretty unusable. Once transformed, it took about a week to set up shelves and storage, and then I just organised it into some kind of order."

"YOU'RE NEVER TOO OLD, AND IT'S NEVER TOO LATE. I'M 25 AND I'LL STILL BE COLLECTING WHEN I'M 50!"

That order not only includes a large number of games he's always loved playing, but it's also provided him with a chance to collect for consoles that he missed the first time around as well. "I missed out on some systems growing up as a kid, which made me want to try them. I've just bought a Sega Dreamcast and Nintendo 64 so I'm kind of focused on those two at the minute. However I have a pretty neat collection of PlayStation and PS2 games. If there is a game I see and it looks good, I will give it a shot and game on! I will try every game in my attic at some point. I try to avoid fodder that I know I wont really play."

So does Jamie have any advice for anyone else wanting to build up their own collection? "The best advice I can give is you're never too old, and it's never too late. I'm 25 and I'll still be collecting when I'm 50! Also, when you're strapped for cash, car boots are your best friend. Some people have no idea what treasures they have in their loft, until a gamer like you comes along and picks up their console for next to nothing." *



WONDER BOY

"When I was younger I played this game at an arcade when I went on holiday with my parents. I absolutely loved it but forgot the name. Years later, I saw it again and knew I had to get it. My Mrs bought it me for around £10 on eBay, so it was technically free!"

PAID: Free

CRASH TEAM RACING

"Still the best version of *Crash Team*. It's so addictive. I bagged this at the car boot for 50p, decent condition, and it came with the original manual."

PAID: 50p



SUPER MARIO 64

"I think this has got to be one of the best original games for Nintendo 64. A complete classic that is always great fun to play and reminisce with. I bought this at a car boot sale."

PAID: £2

HALO GAMES

"I bought these when I had no idea about car boots and ways to get games cheaper. I bought them new, so around £39.99 each. I don't regret it. *Halo* is one of the best games I've played."

PAID: £207



SONIC TRILOGY

"I used to love playing *Sonic* as a kid and couldn't believe how expensive it was when I looked on eBay. Looking out for them at car boots I managed to bag all three for about £5."

PAID: £5

Here's my bio... Paul Rose
Paul Rose is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator and chief writer of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes for kids TV, but can still be found rambling on about games, old and new, for his daily website, Digitiser2000.com.

Do It Yourself: Speccy-style

Because I'm clearly mad, I've spent the last month or two preparing to film a sci-fi movie. By the time you read this, I'll have either managed it, or by weeping and broken in an abandoned nuclear bunker somewhere in the Midlands.

Mr Biffo's Found Footage is a series that will be hitting the Digitiser2000 YouTube channel in September. It's a weird, woozy, deliberately rough-looking sketch show (of sorts), but the finale will be a 30-minute short film, which aims to be slick, glossy, and unique as we can manage on our relatively miniscule budget.

Of interest to **Retro Gamer** readers, it will also mark the first modern onscreen reunion of two stars from CITV's gaming TV show *Bad Influence*. If you want to see Violet Berlin and Nam Rood shooting at bum-faced monsters… this'll be right up your post-apocalyptic alley.

However, it's the budget I wanted to talk about. Though we've splurged on a rather impressive location, it means we can only afford a two-day shoot, our set and props are made from junk and household items, and we'll be doing whatever we can to hide the lack of millions of dollars using clever lighting, shadows, and smoke haze.

Indeed, I realised while compiling the list of shots I need to get how much my approached has been influenced by the ZX Spectrum games I loved. Indeed; that I still love. The fact that they felt handmade, the way their creators worked within their limitations, the fashion in which the Spectrum's default black background could be used to convey depth or atmosphere, somehow made those games more tangible to me.

Certainly, there can be few gamers of my vintage who didn't feel that they could also make their own game. I mean, I never did – but *Mr Biffo's Found Footage* is paying homage to that era however it can. Aside from the way we're working within our limitations on the finale, the series will feature parodies of *The Hobbit*, and a Spectrum-ified musical tribute to Sir Clive Sinclair, revealing the true story of what he got up to post-C5. It's the closest I've come to making my own Spectrum game.

However, I think the Spectrum's DIY aesthetic is one of the reasons – barring the fact games are no longer 'new' to me – why I sometimes struggle somewhat when it comes to engaging with modern gaming. I mean, aside from them all looking the same – shiny armour and holographic displays are the default look for any modern sci-fi game - it doesn't feel as if modern triple-A games are something the average gamer can do. They feel aloof, out of the reach of my ability.

Because of that, I somehow feel detached from them. It's like they're less real, less the product of a person than a machine. They're homogenised, lacking personality. They're never the work of a single vision, but a team of hundreds trying to justify a budget in the millions.

Give me a bedroom coder over that any day.



Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK | @RetroGamer_Mag | darran.jones@futurenet.com



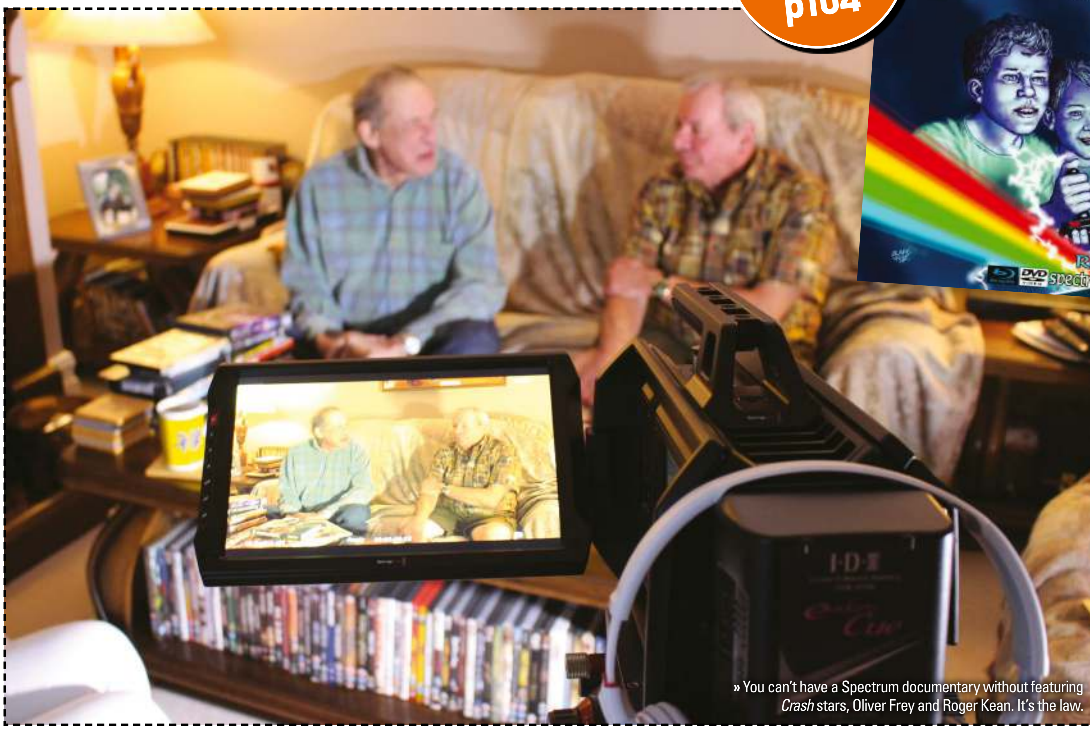
Andy Remic

The fantasy author tells us about his new documentary

CHECK OUT OUR REVIEW ON p104



Andy Remic has always loved the ZX Spectrum. He started off writing various computer games, including text adventures, for the system, before going on to become an English teacher. He now writes novels and has his own ebook publishing company, Anarchy Books, but has never forgotten his first love. That love has now crystallised in the form of a brand-new documentary, *Memoirs Of A Spectrum Addict*.



» You can't have a Spectrum documentary without featuring *Crash* stars, Oliver Frey and Roger Kean. It's the law.

Why create *Memoirs Of A Spectrum Addict*?

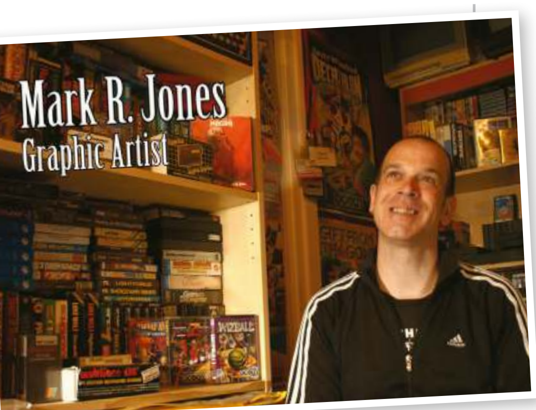
As a child, I was obsessed with the ZX Spectrum. It was in my blood. As the years rolled by, I knew one day I had to make a film about it (and it gave me – *shh* – an excuse to meet my childhood heroes).

So why go down the crowdfunding route?

I'd read about *Bedrooms To Billions*, and how it wasn't 'broadcast standard'. I wanted the best equipment to make this happen, hence lots of research, so I used crowdfunding to generate the money needed to buy what I needed: a Blackmagic Ursa 4K. That's probably why I then went £15,000 over budget. Ha! I didn't earn enough.

How long has it taken to film?

Two years. A non-amicable divorce got very much in the way. Anybody who has been through a protracted (and ongoing) non-amicable divorce will relate to that and understand. And Tim Stamper took years to get in touch with. In fact, I'm still waiting.



» Mark R Jones' enthusiasm for the Spectrum is infectious. He's a great addition to the documentary.

How does making a film compare to working on books?

I'm quite solitary and shy (yeah, right). Writing is a solitary business but I enjoy the solitude, the creative process, being 'god' – it's also why I used to climb mountains. To be alone. Thus, I *love* the editing process of film-making, the creative structuring, creating something original… but the interviewing hit me a like a sock full of half-brick. I was suddenly interviewing my childhood 'heroes' – which is why my partner Marie got involved. Before interviewing Steve Turner, I was a gibbering imbecile, and then there she was, just chatting away about her grandma. It became a symbiotic process – Marie would 'interview', I'd film and do sound.

What issues have you encountered along the way?

4K. What a pain in the arse – with regards sheer volume of data, editing, processing power, rendering time. I mean, it looks beautiful, just awesome in 4K fully rendered, but it's a massive time sink, a resource sink, just a – a big sink.

> "The Spectrum… I was an obsessive. It was my drug. I was an (ahem) Spectrum Addict"
>
> Andy Remic

Why chose to focus on the ZX Spectrum?

The Spectrum was my childhood machine. In those old Speccy vs C64 arguments, I was Spectrum all the way. I couldn't make a film about the Commodore 64 because I don't care about it. To some filmmakers – this retro thing is a cash cow. It's like, I couldn't make a romantic comedy: I don't care. But the Spectrum… I was an obsessive. It was my drug. I was an (ahem) Spectrum Addict.

What's the most interesting anecdote you can tell us about making the film?

Oh. Watching Clive Townsend do a cider-fuelled *Saboteur* forward-roll across a hedge was pretty cool – I wondered if he was going to break his spine. As was Clive showing us around the village where *Hot Fuzz* was filmed. My personal favourite, though, was being 'escorted' from a certain dockland hotel after interviewing Mev Dinc 'guerrilla-style' (i.e. not telling anybody what we were doing'). I learnt a while back that the more people you tell, the more people whinge and whine – so we just do it, and if we're moved on, we're moved on. In this case by security. After *two hours* of filming. I salute their security. And I blame Mev. It was all his fault.

Why do you think there's still so much love for the Spectrum?

I think, despite what Sir Clive intended, it became a games obsession for many. It became a way of life – an addiction. And that's what fuelled my film! My Spectrum addiction. *

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES

AUGUST 2000 – One hardware death, the gaming equivalent of a nil-nil draw on a rainy Sunday afternoon, a few good games and not a lot of news. That's what we enjoyed during 2000's summer holiday – let's dive on in...





[Dreamcast] *Marvel Vs Capcom 2* was excellent, though the multiformat mags weren't keen on making that clear.

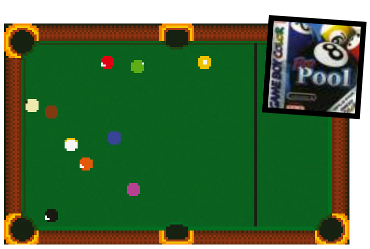
NEWS AUGUST 2000

On 12 August 2000, the first major Russian naval operation in a decade ended in tragedy when the Kursk submarine was sunk, killing all on board. During the loading of a dummy torpedo, a hydrogen peroxide solution leaked from the weapon due to faulty case welding. This caused an explosion with kerosene fuel, which killed a number of crew and started a major fire. This fire caused the explosion of roughly half a dozen warheads, killing any survivors and tearing a major hole in the hull. The Russian government claimed that the submarine had merely been grounded and that all crew members were alive on 14 August, but following rescue aid from the UK and Norway, the military was forced to reveal the deaths of all crew on 23 August.

London gangster Reggie Kray was released from prison on 26 August 2000, having served over 30 years for a series of crimes including murder throughout the Fifties and Sixties. The end of this life sentence was ordered by the Home Secretary Jack Straw, after it was discovered that Kray was suffering from terminal cancer. Kray spent the remainder of his life with his wife Roberta, whom he'd married in 1997, before passing away in his sleep on 1 October 2000. He was buried next to his twin brother and partner in crime Ronnie Kray, who had died of a heart attack five years earlier.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM AUGUST 2000

Though it barely registered on many peoples' radars, SNK's Neo-Geo Pocket gained the unfortunate distinction of becoming the first console casualty of the decade, after less than one year on the shelves. While the system wasn't anywhere near challenging the *Pokémon*-driven resurgence of the Game Boy, the system was gaining a following amongst hardcore gamers and had quickly amassed a strong library of games. The news came as a shock to SNK Europe – speaking to *Arcade*, UK managing director Robbie Phillips said, "We've all worked hard to establish the platform in a short space of time and it's a pity that we never got a chance to show what the brand could do with real support." The move was part of a total withdrawal from non-Japanese markets at the behest of Aruze, a pachinko manufacturer that had recently taken over SNK.



[Game Boy Color]In a month of slim pickings for Nintendo fans, *Pro Pool* came out on top.

The release of the month was the arrival of EA's world-conquering *FIFA* series on the PS2. Unfortunately, *FIFA Soccer: World Championship* had a lot in common with other early PS2 games, in that it was nowhere near living up to the hype. While the graphical leap over the previous generation was noted, *GamesMaster*'s 67% review swiftly condemned it, saying "that's all the game is good for – watching". *Arcade* was similarly unimpressed in a 3/5 review, complaining that "the players are just plain stupid" and that multiplayer hinged on enjoying the errors. "The terrible refereeing decisions become comical and the inability of your players to clear the simplest ball out of the box becomes clown-like," Nick Jones complained, concluding "that says it all, *FIFA* is fun for all the wrong reasons."

Big names were thin on the ground elsewhere, as the post-E3 news lull combined with the usual summer software drought. This ensured that some of the less high-profile games came to the fore in review sections this month, with the best of them *Silent Bomber*, a high-quality PlayStation action game from the virtually unknown Japanese developer CyberConnect2. The game puts you in control of mercenary Jutah Fate, whose goal is to blow up the mothership Dante from the inside with remote controlled bombs. *Arcade* declared it 'PlayStation Game Of The Month', and while we're not sure that we'd agree with the description, "*Metal Gear Solid* with a firework up its arse," we can definitely agree with the 4/5 score. *GamesMaster* concluded that it's "not sexy, but got it where it counts" in an 86% review.

Over on the Dreamcast, *Marvel Vs Capcom 2* was the biggest game of the month. This 2D fighter took the standard Capcom crossover formula and turned everything up to 11 – the game's three-on-three tag battles were



[PS2] Premier League visuals meet Sunday league game design in *FIFA*'s first next-gen outing.


[PlayStation] *Silent Bomber* received strong reviews and went on to become a cult favourite.

characterised by extreme speed, screen-filling special moves and enormous combos. There was also a huge roster of 56 characters, taking in the likes of *Street Fighter, Resident Evil, Mega Man, X-Men*, Spider-Man and Iron Man. Despite the game's quality and competitive longevity, the press gave it a surprisingly muted response – *GamesMaster* could only find space for a 25-word review, despite awarding the game 91%, and *Arcade* gave it 3/5 despite describing it as "2D fighting at its very best."

N64 Magazine could only find one UK release to review this month, Konami's basketball sim *NBA In The Zone 2000.* Sadly, it wasn't anything to shout about – despite receiving four pages of coverage (likely due to necessity rather than enthusiasm), the game got just 69% from Alan Maddrell. The kicker was that *NBA Courtside 2 Featuring Kobe Bryant*, an import basketball game reviewed immediately afterwards, scored 87% and would never receive a PAL release. Also on import, the nostalgia-baiting duo of *Namco Museum 64* and *Space Invaders* received 70% and 73% respectively. Game Boy Color owners had more to choose from but still struggled this month, with only *Pro Pool* standing out amongst a pile of dross including *Ultimate Paintball* and *Catz. N64 Magazine* felt that it played as well as *Virtual Pool* on the N64, while *Arcade* enjoyed the adult sense of humour. Both magazines scored it 4/5.

Vampire The Masquerade: Redemption arrived on PC this month, and nobody could quite agree on how good it was. The RPG based on the tabletop franchise earned the ire of *Edge*, which gave it 4/10. "The biggest fault of the game is in the overall structure, which repeatedly deprives the player of any degree of choice," the reviewer complained, who felt that the game was "an abject failure to convey the spirit of the pen-and-paper original." *Arcade* went down the middle, offering 3/5 and an observation that the multiplayer was far better than the single-player. *C&VG*'s Maura Sutton felt that it was "one of the most lavish RPGs ever" and gave it 4/5.

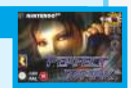
Still, with Next Month pages touting the likes of *Final Fantasy IX* and *WWF No Mercy*, and the inevitable Christmas rush coming soon after, it's not as if there was a lack of things to look forward to in the future. Join us again next time to see how those things turned out. *


[PC] What kind of vampire uses a massive chain gun to take out his enemies?

CHARTS

AUGUST 2000

NINTENDO 64



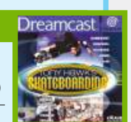
1 Perfect Dark (Nintendo)
2 Pokémon Stadium (Nintendo)
3 The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time (Nintendo)
4 Track & Field 2000 (Konami)
5 Turok: Rage Wars (Acclaim)

PLAYSTATION



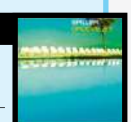
1 Colin McRae Rally 2.0 (Codemasters)
2 WWF Smackdown (THQ)
3 Euro 2000 (Electronic Arts)
4 F1 2000 (Electronic Arts)
5 Star Wars: Jedi Power Battles (LucasArts)

DREAMCAST



1 Tony Hawk's Skateboarding (Crave)
2 Resident Evil: Code Veronica (Eidos)
3 Wacky Races (Infogrames)
4 Crazy Taxi (Sega)
5 MDK2 (Interplay)

MUSIC



1 Groovejet [If This Ain't Love] (Spiller)
2 Out Of Your Mind (True Steppers/ Bowers/Beckham)
3 Rock DJ (Robbie Williams)
4 I Turn To You (Melanie C)
5 Lucky (Britney Spears)

THIS MONTH IN…



N64

Secret 151st Pokémon Mew had arrived in the UK, with Nintendo holding an event at the Bluewater shopping centre in Kent to distribute the mythical creature. It wasn't the most high-tech of affairs, though – the download stations were basically comprised of old SNES consoles running the distribution software through Super Game Boy hardware.



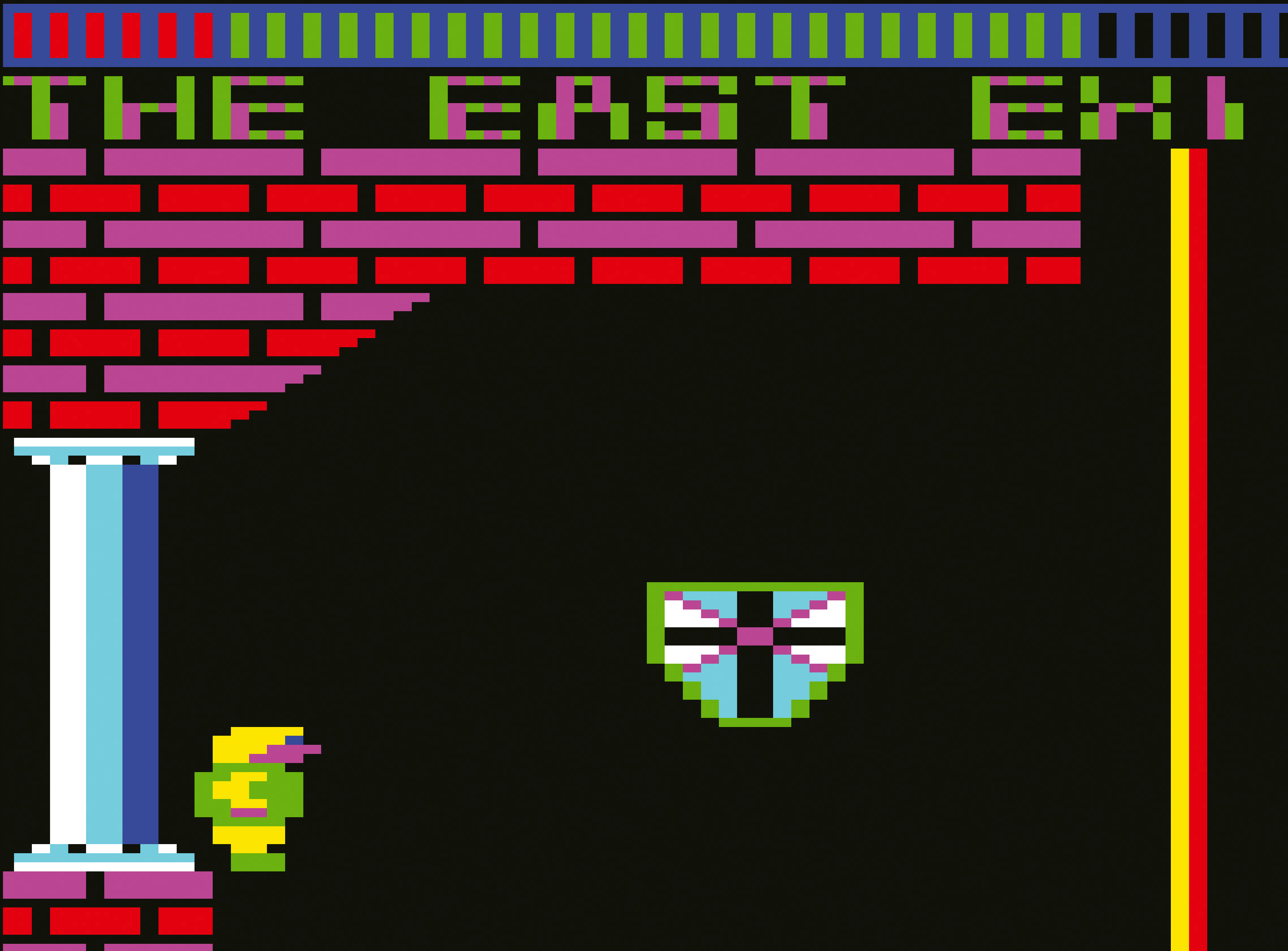
Edge

Was the Dreamcast in big trouble? According to *Edge*'s "Ever Decreasing Circles?" feature, it was indeed. An impressive launch had stalled, and for most of 2000 it was selling similar numbers to the N64 – a console in decline. "They almost had a chance, but now I fear their chance has gone" said Jez San on Sega.



Arcade

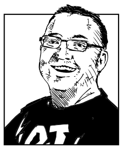
"The Japanese taste in videogames is almost as strange as their taste in food," declares a ridiculous feature entitled "The Japanese. Bonkers? Surely not?" Apparently, *Densha De Go* and *Tokimeki Memorial 2* were proof that Japan was, indeed, mad. Indeed – in the West, we play *Train Simulator 2017, Dropsy* and *Dream Daddy* instead.



Palace Of Magic

A DISCOVERY THREE DECADES IN THE MAKING

RETROREVIVAL



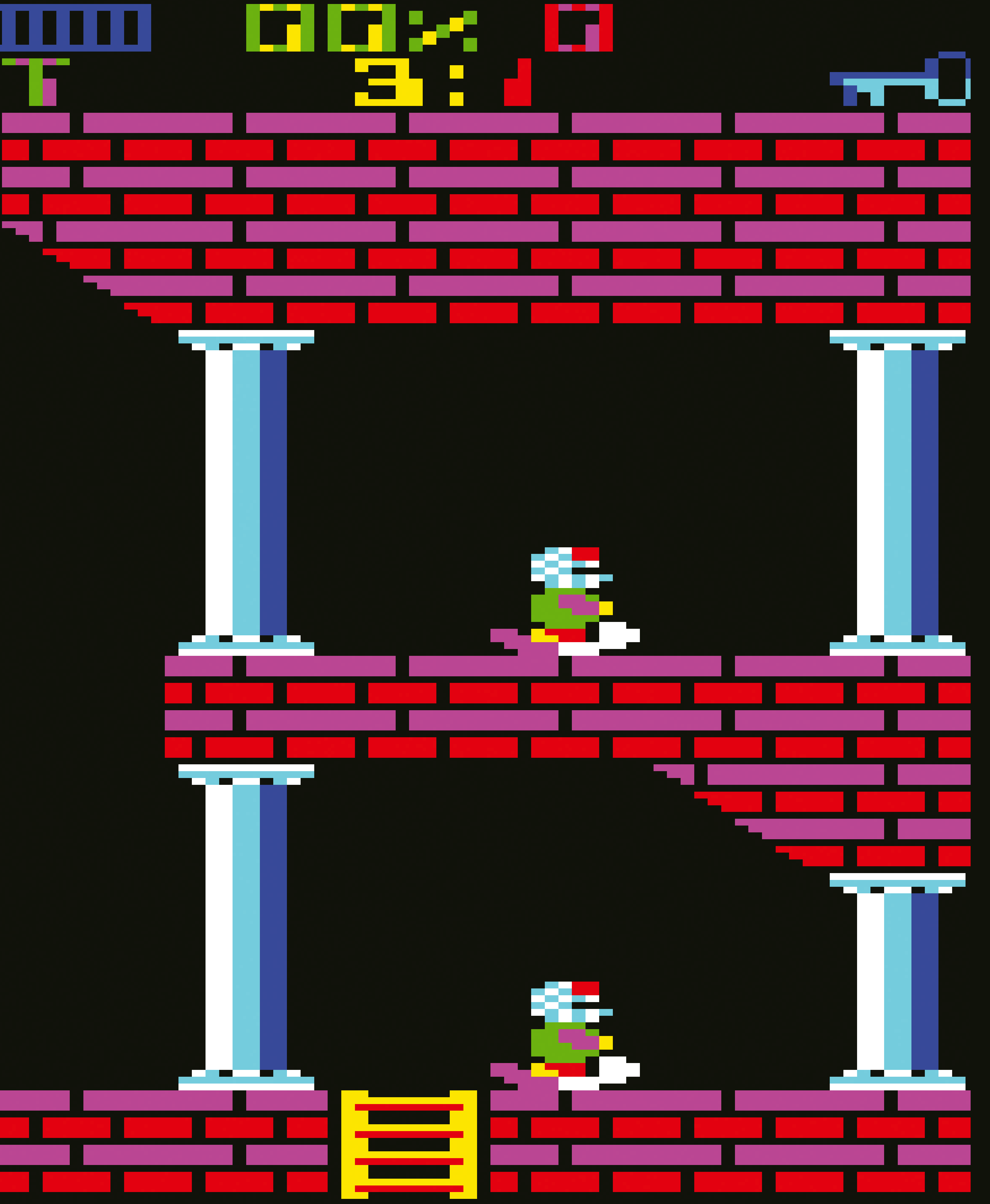
» BBC MICRO » 1987 » SUPERIOR SOFTWARE

This BBC Micro release escaped my attention on its debut, mainly because I only knew a few people who owned a BBC Micro when I was a kid. Luckily, we now live in the age of the internet, and it's possible to discuss games with all sorts of people and even see what said games are like without the need to ever pop over to someone's house.

I first came into contact with Martyn R Howard's entertaining adventure game a few months back as it was being sold on a Facebook group that I'm a member of. It immediately caught my attention because there was a frog on the cover (I like frogs) along with a stylish-looking castle. I headed over to YouTube to get a little more information about it and felt it seemed interesting enough to warrant actually playing.

I'm glad I gave it a whirl, because Howard's game still holds up exceptionally well today. Yes, it has the garish eye-assaulting colours that so many BBC Micro games seem to suffer from, but it also has decent collision detection, tightly honed controls and a quick fluid pace to it that makes exploring the huge palace a joy rather than a chore. It's also surprisingly complex with keys and other objects slowly opening up new sections of the sprawling palace. I've seen it described in the same breath as *Metroid*, but it's not really on par with Nintendo's gem, as your main character never really expands his skills beyond the ability to jump. It's clear that a lot of thought has gone into *Palace Of Magic*'s level design, though, and if I still had access to gridded paper, I'd probably feel the itch to map it all out so I could uncover every last secret.

I came under fire a few months back because I professed my dislike of *Chuckie Egg II*, suggesting it had aged poorly (which it has). While I still believe that there are a fair number of classic home computer games that are nowhere near as good as our rose-tinted memories of them, it's equally satisfying to discover plenty of seemingly-forgotten titles that play as good now as they did on their original release. *


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PC Engine

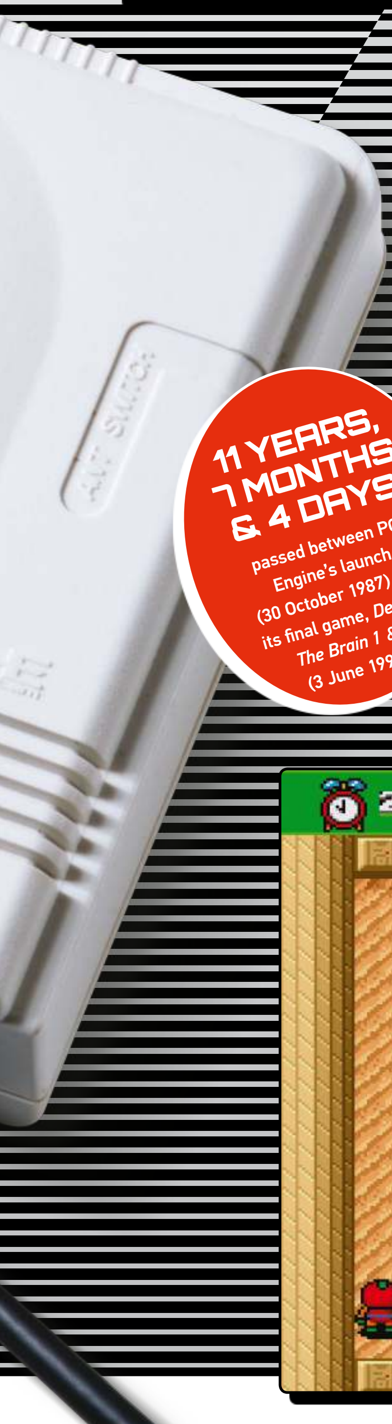
Import Icon

As NEC's diminutive console reaches its 30th anniversary, we remember how its combination of exoticism and arcade appeal gave birth to the market for import games. Join Nick Thorpe for a look back at this legendary piece of hardware…









"IF YOU HAD MONEY AND WERE A HARDCORE GAMER, THE PC ENGINE WAS THE COOLEST SYSTEM YOU COULD OWN"

Julian Rignall

Japanese console manufacturers didn't have an easy time of breaking into the European gaming market – but then, it can't be said that they put much effort into it. Unlike in North America, where Nintendo and Sega had dedicated operations, the NES and Master System were introduced into European territories by third-party distributors in 1987. The consoles occupied an awkward middle ground in the gaming market. The hardware was more capable than the 8-bit home micros, and competitively priced, but software was slow to arrive and cost as much as full-price games for the 16-bit computers.

So when the May 1988 issue *Computer & Video Games* featured a report on a tiny Japanese wonder-console capable of sublime arcade-perfect games, you'd have been forgiven for being sceptical – especially given that the author of the 'Mean Machines' column had a penchant for enthusiastic hyperbole. "Forget Nintendo and Sega, they are not even a spit in the ocean in terms of power and gameplay," Tony Takoushi gushed in his two-page feature introducing this technical marvel. "I have used all the superlatives in the past and yet none of them begin to be adequate when you come up against the *most powerful console in the world*." It's often said that if something sounds too good to be true, then it usually is. However, hype will always beat scepticism when gamers are concerned, and the seed was planted in the minds of British gamers – the PC Engine was something to watch.

Designed by Hudson Soft and manufactured by electronics giant NEC, the PC Engine actually lived up to the claims made about it. Roughly the size of three CD cases stacked atop one another, the machine could display sprites that were larger and more colourful than the other consoles, and it could display more of them. With six audio channels it delivered richer sound than the Sega and Nintendo machines, and the games came on thin cards. However, with no UK model available, players had to take Tony's word for it – and with that in mind, we wondered how he first came to witness the machine.

"I used to get games and consoles direct from Japan and the USA and review them for UK magazines in the early days when few (if any) others did so. It was expensive with phone calls and shipping but very exciting times," says Tony, remembering his writing days. "I saw the PC Engine in a Japanese magazine while I was working for Virgin Mastertronic and mentioned it to Frank Herman, one of the directors, who was about to go to Japan on business. He returned with one and a few games – an RPG, *Drunken Master* and a Namco platformer. Wow!" Despite the fact that the console was impossible to obtain in the UK, Tony continued to cover the PC Engine in his Mean Machines sections. "I was very lucky the editor Tim Metcalfe was awesome and understood the excitement and impact of these reviews, and letting people know what was coming (hopefully) to our shores."

The decision to run with the coverage despite the machine's lack of an official presence in the UK proved to be the right move. "The response was *insane*, everyone wanted to get it but NEC had no plans to release in the UK, they were looking to a US launch was best I heard. *CVG* got inundated with mail asking for more info and reviews," remembers Tony. However, not everybody welcomed the attention that the console was gathering. "I decided to call NEC and see if they were going to release/confirm arrival of the



» [PC Engine] The PC Engine's colour handling allowed the original *Lords Of Thunder* to outshine its Mega-CD conversion.

11 YEARS, 7 MONTHS & 4 DAYS
passed between PC Engine's launch (30 October 1987) and its final game, *Dead Of The Brain 1 & 2* (3 June 1999).



» [PC Engine] A special adaptor was needed for multiplayer games like *Bomberman '93* due to the PC Engine only having one controller port.





PCE in Europe. I eventually got through to the relevant person at NEC in Europe who said, 'So it was you that did the review… I'm seriously thinking about putting a contract out on you for the heat you've caused us!'"

Like the public, members of the press quickly started paying attention to the new machine based on the coverage it received in *CVG*. *The Games Machine* featured a PC Engine cover story in issue eight, which included repeated references to the Mean Machines coverage, and *ACE* also began to cover the machine. The attention from multiformat magazines was expected, but even the dedicated ZX Spectrum magazine *Crash* would find itself giving the PC Engine a few pages before the Eighties were over. The console was simply too exciting to ignore.

Zzap!64 editor Julian 'Jaz' Rignall was also paying attention. "I first heard about the PC Engine in early 1988 through *Computer & Video Games* magazine's original Mean Machines column, which was written by freelancer Tony Takoushi. He was very enthusiastic about the system and its handful of games, and my interest was well and truly piqued by his hype," remembers the veteran journalist, who despite



» [PC Engine] *Gate Of Thunder* was available as a pack-in game for the American Turbo Duo alongside *Bonk's Adventure*, *Bonk's Revenge* and *Bomberman*.

being editor of a Commodore 64 magazine, was starting to be drawn away from the home computers. "At the time I was seriously getting into consoles – I had both an NES and a Master System – and this new-generation machine sounded very promising indeed."

Julian moved to *CVG* during 1988, and by the end of the year he was a key part of the Mean Machines column – and with that move came his first chance to actually check out the PC Engine. "I persuaded *CVG* editor Eugene Lacey to let me expense a PC Engine for the office, and a week or two later it arrived." The experience wasn't quite what Julian had expected, however. "I was really excited, but unfortunately it came with just two games: *Shanghai* and *Kato-Chan Ken-Chan*. While the latter was quite amusing for its crude sense of humour, neither game blew me away. They were just okay."

669
HuCard and CD-ROM games were released for the PC Engine in Japan.



So what was it that turned this opinion around? "A couple of weeks later we got hold of *R-Type*, and that was absolutely sensational," Julian explains. "I loved the coin-op, so getting the chance to play what felt like a carbon copy at home was quite the revelation. That game really showcased the PC Engine's potential, and immediately made me a huge fan of the system. Over the following months more really high-quality games were released, including *Galaga '88*, *Legendary Axe*, *Alien Crush*, *Space Harrier* and *Dragon Spirit*. All helped make the PC Engine – in my eyes at least – the single most desirable games machine of the period."

BEGINNER'S GUIDE

Here's a guide to what you'll need to play the complete library of PC Engine software

CARD

- 2 -20 megabit capacity
- Region locked

HuCard

280 GAMES

- Playable on all PC Engine consoles
- Connector pins are at the top of the card when artwork is the right way up

SuperGrafx

5 GAMES

- Only playable on SuperGrafx consoles
- The connector pins are at the bottom of the card when artwork is the right way up

CD

- Up to 650 megabit capacity
- Region-free

CD-ROM²

120 GAMES

- Playable as standard on all PC Engine Duo and Super CD-ROM² consoles
- System Card 1.0 or higher required on original CD-ROM² add-on





A record **20 MEGABIT** HuCard was used for *Street Fighter II: Championship Edition* (that's 2.5 times the size of the next biggest card).

"THE PERSON AT NEC SAID, 'SO IT WAS YOU THAT DID THE REVIEW… I'M SERIOUSLY THINKING ABOUT PUTTING A CONTRACT OUT ON YOU!'"

Tony Takoushi

As well as delivering a selection of unmatched arcade conversions, the PC Engine was breaking new ground with the introduction of CD-ROM technology. This was by no means cheap, but for your trouble you were able to play the best home conversion of the popular Capcom arcade game *Street Fighter*. *Bikkuriman Daijikai* was less accessible to non-Japanese audiences, but the heaps of speech and CD audio showed the possibilities of this high-capacity storage medium. In introducing this system, *CVG* also made a famous comparison. "I thought that it might be a good idea to show how small it was by including something in the shot that everybody could relate to. Fortunately, I'd just been across the road to Arkwrights, the local corner store, to buy some afternoon snacks, and just happened to have a packet of Skips at hand," remembers Julian. "We'd said numerous times that the PC Engine was diminutive, but that picture really helped readers understand just how truly tiny it was." Indeed, it captured the imagination of readers to the point that our own Editor Darran Jones still describes the console as being as big as a packet of crisps.

By this point, players had received about a year of PC Engine coverage and had their wallets primed and ready. "Judging by the mail we received, it seemed that many of *CVG*'s readers were very excited about the PC Engine – which wasn't particularly surprising considering how incredibly enthusiastic we were when we wrote about the console and its games," says Julian.



» [PC Engine] RPGs like *Cosmic Fantasy 2* benefit massively from the shift from HuCards to CD-ROM.



"Most people wanted to know when it was going to be officially launched, how much it'd cost, and what games would be released in the UK." The only problem was NEC – the company was silent on all of those matters.

What happened next was unprecedented in the videogaming market at the time. With a clear demand for PC Engine products and no official supply of them, entrepreneurial types began to import the machines directly from Japan to sell on in their own regions. Magazines were suddenly stuffed with adverts for import game retailers, eager to sell you this previously elusive console. Importing presented some new considerations for players, who had to know if they needed a SCART or PAL machine, as well as get an appropriate step-down converter for 110V power. However, even factoring in the price premium associated with importing, a PC Engine would cost you £200 or so – less than an Atari ST, and about half the price of an Amiga 500. This wasn't just limited to the UK market, either. The most sophisticated PC Engine import operation of the time seems to have been the French company Sodipeng (Société De Distribution De La PC Engine), a subsidiary of accessory manufacturer Guillemot International which sold imported consoles with unique French instructions and packaging, and even warranty support.

LASERDISC

SUPER CD-ROM²
255 GAMES
- Playable as standard on all PC Engine Duo and Super CD-ROM² consoles
- Super System Card 3.0 or higher required on original CD-ROM² add-on

ARCADE CD-ROM²
11 GAMES
- Arcade Card Duo required on all PC Engine Duo and Super CD-ROM² consoles
- Arcade Card Pro required on original CD-ROM² add-on

LD-ROM²
11 GAMES
- Only playable on a Pioneer LaserActive with PC Engine expansion module
- Contains high-quality analogue video
- Region-free

SIZE MATTERS

The PC Engine is a famously dinky piece of gaming hardware – here's how it stacks up against other devices



"I ACTUALLY LOVE THAT WE DIDN'T HAVE AN OFFICIAL RELEASE BECAUSE WE GOT ALL THE TITLES IN THEIR PUREST FORMS"

Paul Weller

One of the customers funnelled into the PC Engine market by the press and importers was Paul Weller, who today runs the PC Engine Software Bible at pcengine.co.uk, one of the best online resources for fans of the system. "It was the first machine that truly felt like the arcade experience. Previously I had a Sega Master System and while it was great, the limitations were obvious. But the PC Engine ran fast and smooth with loads of sprites and amazing sound. It was a turning point in consoles for me," Paul reflects. "The physical design of the machine was also highly appealing, and because the games were all imports it added an exotic air to them."

The import market didn't go unnoticed. Within a few months, NEC would take out advertising that warned users about imported PC Engine consoles – they were likely modified without NEC's consent and the company wouldn't offer warranty support or repairs for them. Its intent as a deterrent against import purchases was obvious, but went largely unheeded by players. As far as the public was concerned, the PC Engine was available and NEC's endorsement was no big deal – after all, the company still hadn't come forward with any release plans to make waiting worthwhile.

3 MAIN CHIPS make up the PC Engine – the HuC6280A CPU/sound generator, the HuC6270 GPU and the HuC6260 video encoder.





12
distinct HuCard-compatible PC Engine devices were released in Japan: PC Engine, PC Engine Shuttle, SuperGrafx, CoreGrafx, CoreGrafx II, PC Engine GT, PC Engine LT, PC Engine Duo, PC Engine Duo-R, Sharp X1 Twin, PC-KD863G monitor, Pioneer Laseractive PAC-N1 control pack.

Ironically, the reason that the warnings were being placed was because those official plans did exist – NEC was just keeping quiet about them, since North America was going to be tackled first. The decision makes some sense, since Nintendo had already established videogame consoles as a hot product in the region, and the European market's various languages and customs present additional challenges. It ultimately turned out to be a bad move, squandering a market primed and ready for the system for the potential to make even more money. The PC Engine was released in North America in late 1989, redesigned and rebranded as the Turbografx-16, and an initial batch of PAL units simply called Turbografx made it as far as manufacturing. However, the system bombed with the American audience and NEC lost confidence in the system's European prospects, quietly pulling the plug on its unannounced release and offloading its stock to Telegames.

The system's failure to launch in Europe resulted in a decline in coverage for the system. "It was a real disappointment when we realised the machine wasn't ever going to officially hit UK shores, but by that time the Mega Drive and Super Famicom had arrived and were beginning to take up the lion's share of our focus," remembers Julian. "It's not that I lost interest in the PC Engine per se – I've always loved the machine – but there was just a lot more excitement surrounding the Super Famicom and Mega Drive as we headed into the Nineties. *CVG*'s readers also seemed to be far more interested in hearing about Nintendo and Sega's new machines because they knew that it was only a matter of time before they were officially launched in the UK." When *Mean Machines* launched in October of 1990, the Amstrad GX4000 took the PC Engine's cover spot because while it was unproven, its official release meant that it actually had a chance of attracting some advertising.



» We couldn't resist a modern day re-enactment of the Skips comparison. Truly, we stand on the shoulders of giants.

As an import console, game prices would always be high, as Paul remembers: "It did mean I'd have to be quite particular and careful about what I spent my money on. But luckily I think my core collection from back then was very solid." As mainstream coverage of the PC Engine in the UK press went into decline, players would eventually have to look elsewhere for information. "I'd regularly read (i.e. look at the pictures) the Japanese magazines as well to get the lowdown on the latest titles," notes Paul. "I was also lucky enough to have a couple of friends who would have the resources to buy a lot more games than I did, so there was always a chance for me to experience a range of new titles that I couldn't afford."

While the lack of an official release did present some unusual obstacles, the import-only nature of the machine only added to the appeal for those players that had already bought in. "I actually love that we didn't have an official release because we got all the titles in their purest forms without censorship or having to put up with tacky name changes and bad cover art," says Paul. "I was really into the manga/anime style back then – it was something fresh and new and hard to get hold of in the UK at the time, so I tended to gravitate towards anything with that kind of art on it. *Schbibin Man* was one of my early pickups, as well as *City Hunter* as I was a pretty big fan of the comic."



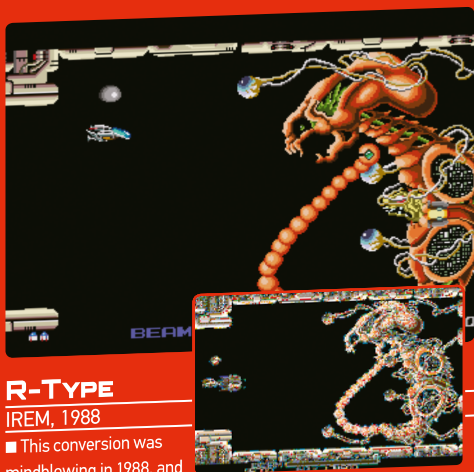
» [PC Engine] *Bonk's Revenge* put the system's power to use with excellent cartoon animation, like this fishing gag.

As we moved into the Nineties, the nature of the PC Engine market changed considerably – but with coverage now the domain of fanzines like *Electric Brain*, UK players won't have noticed unless they were already invested. The

PC Engine

ARCADE PERFECT?

The PC Engine was famed for its conversions – here's how some notable examples compare to the originals



R-Type

IREM, 1988

■ This conversion was mindblowing in 1988, and it's still impressive today. While it's not quite a 1:1 fit with the arcade game graphically, you'd be hard-pressed to notice unless you put the two side by side. The sound is also slightly weaker on the PC Engine, which is common – most arcade games were using FM sound by this point.



Galaga '88

NAMCO, 1988

■ The original arcade game uses a vertically-oriented monitor, but the PC Engine stays horizontal with some small black borders making for a square playfield. The arcade game generally exhibits higher quality sprite work with superior shading, too. Thankfully, the cosmetic changes don't mar an excellent blaster.



Out Run

NEC AVENUE, 1990

■ While the PC Engine version of *Out Run* is generally considered to be the best of the early bunch of coin-op conversions, the arcade machine was a sprite monster and Hudson's hardware could never realistically hope to match its processing power. There's no sprite scaling and fewer sprites on screen overall with this version, and this opening stage misses the sea on the left-hand side of the road. Still, it's an admirable effort to say the least.

¥24,800
PC Engine's price on launch (30/10/1987).

¥57,800
CD-ROM² System's price on launch (4/12/1988).

emergence of the Super CD-ROM² format in 1991 sent HuCard releases into decline, as the CD format allowed NEC some advantages over the explosively popular Super Famicom, but Paul was still along for the ride. "The PC Engine was always designed to have the CD add-on, and as such it felt like a natural progression of the machine, unlike the Mega-CD," he notes. "I was lucky enough to buy a CD unit from a friend (after playing titles like *Monster Lair* and *Ys* I just had to have one) so I was building up a good library of both CD and HuCard games, but mostly focussing on the CDs."

While some great arcade conversions were released on disc including *Pomping World* (better known as *Pang*) and *Gradius II*, the high capacity of CDs was more commonly used for digital comics, RPGs and adventure games with lavish animation and lots of speech. "CD-based games opened up a whole new world which was truly exciting to be a part of. We now had stunning anime-style visual scenes, amazing music and the storage capability that allowed for some incredible games," says Paul, and there's no denying the quality of what's out there. Original games like *Gate Of Thunder* and *Winds Of Thunder*, the *Cosmic Fantasy* games and *Castlevania: Rondo Of Blood* were simply fantastic, and the CD-ROM system attracted more RPG conversions such as *Might & Magic III* and *Dungeon Master*. It's hard to disgree when Paul says "To me, a PC Engine without a CD unit is only half a machine."

Still, one last play for the arcade lover's cash was made in the form of 1994's Arcade Card, a CD-ROM add-on which gave the PC Engine an additional two megabytes of RAM – a preposterous amount by the standards of the day, more suited to next-generation machines. While it did allow the system









Golden Axe

RENOVATION, 1990

■ While many PC Engine arcade conversions are great, stinkers like this ensure that you still need to do your research. CD-ROM owners must have felt well and truly ripped off – while some nice arranged music and animated cutscenes utilise the extra storage well, the sluggish controls and laughable graphics ruin the experience.





Fatal Fury 2

HUDSON SOFT, 1994

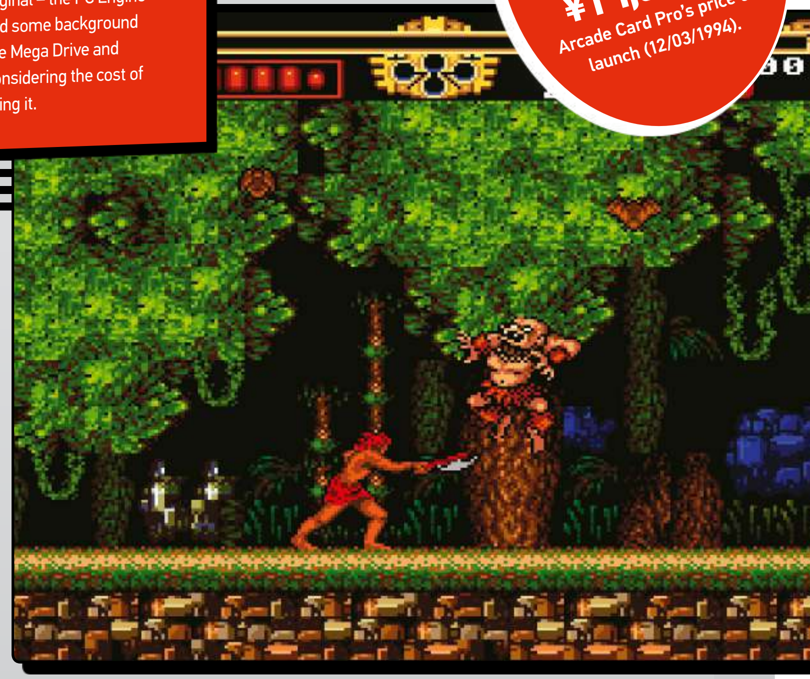
■ This late conversion comes surprisingly close to the Neo-Geo original – the PC Engine sprites aren't quite as big and don't scale, and some background detail is lost. However, it knocks spots off the Mega Drive and SNES versions, which it frankly should do considering the cost of an Arcade CD-ROM² system capable of running it.





¥9,800 Super System Card 3.0's price on launch (25/10/1991).

¥17,800 Arcade Card Pro's price on launch (12/03/1994).



» [PC Engine] Jaz Rignall counts *The Legendary Axe* as one of his favourite PC Engine games.

"I THINK THE PC ENGINE WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN KICKING OFF THE UK IMPORT GAME MARKET"

Julian Rignall

to host the best conversions of Neo-Geo games, it didn't revitalise the system like the advent of Super CD-ROM² did – just 11 dedicated Arcade CD-ROM² games came out.

Paul is still heavily involved in the PC Engine scene – as well as his website, he has worked on homebrew games, fanzines and much more. For him, flying the PC Engine flag is a labour of love. "Retro gaming is big these days, but most of the chat is Nintendo this or Sega that. The PC Engine is a bit of an underdog and it's nice to supply information that allows people that are new to the machine to discover how great it really is," he explains. "The PC Engine isn't my only beloved system, but it's the one that needs more appreciation."

Those who were lucky enough to experience it at the time need no convincing of the PC Engine's quality, of course. Tony still remembers being drawn to "the speed, colour, size and accuracy of the conversions coupled with the *tiny* size of the console itself," and has a list of favourite games a mile long, including *Gunhed* ("For all the men among you who could take the bullet heat!"), *Monster Lair* ("*Awesome* music track, one of the best ever") and *SonSon II*. "I took it down to Jeff Minter and we literally holed up for two days playing this game between us and chowed down, one of my best memories from that time!"

"I have very fond memories playing the early PC Engine arcade conversions like *Galaga '88*, Dragon Spirit, and *R-Type I* and *R-Type II*. I also spent a lot of my time mastering the two pinball games, *Alien Crush* and *Devil Crash* – both of which are superb," Julian says enthusiastically. "Then there's *Vigilante*, *Splatterhouse*, *Pac-Land* and *Side Arms*. Oh! And I can't forget *Legendary Axe* too: a classic platformer that features some fantastic music."

It seems strange to talk about the legacy of a console in a market which never officially had it, but the PC Engine actually seems to have created a legacy by virtue of its non-release. Can the PC Engine be credited with the rise of import gaming in the UK? "I think yes, that would be fair to say, the PC Engine started it all, then it continued with Mega Drive and SNES and more esoteric systems like the X68000 from Sharp," says Tony. "I think the PC Engine was instrumental in kicking off the UK import game market – buoyed in part by the journalistic hype from magazines like *CVG*," agrees Julian. "If you look at early grey import advertisements in magazines of the period, they were very much focused on the PC Engine. If you had money and were a hardcore gamer, the PC Engine was the coolest system you could own."

Ultimately, that's what drove players to the system – we're always searching for the latest and greatest ways to experience our games, and it doesn't matter how we get them. The PC Engine was the turning point at which consoles overtook computers as the most exciting hardware to play games on, and neither a foreign language nor high costs would deter some of us from having it. *

NES Advantage

» PLATFORM: NES **» RELEASED:** 1987 **» COST:** £39.95 (LAUNCH), £30+ (TODAY, BOXED), £10+ (TODAY, LOOSE)

Nintendo's official joystick for the NES might not seem like much given the standard of arcade-style controllers that would follow, but for the late Eighties it was a trailblazing product. As well as the small joystick and four regular buttons, the NES Advantage had some neat tricks of its own. First of all, the A and B buttons offered a turbo fire option, with individual activation switches and adjustable speed dials to achieve the optimum rate of fire. There was also a switch marked 'Slow', which achieved a slow-motion effect by rapidly hitting the start button, pausing and resuming the game in progress. This feature was unheard of at the time, but soon became a popular inclusion on controllers for all formats. Finally, the controller actually includes two connectors and a switch to choose between player 1 and 2, so that both players can use the NES Advantage in multiplayer games where players take turns.

The NES Advantage is a treat for any fan of the NES aesthetic, as the design and colour scheme mimic those of the console itself. The large buttons are satisfyingly springy, and while the joystick isn't microswitched, the ball-top design is at least a familiar one to regular arcadegoers. *





ESSENTIAL GAME Gun-Nac

Shoot-'em-ups can always benefit from a good joystick controller, especially one with an excellent turbo function, and *Gun-Nac* is a very good example of this. After adjusting the dial to the sweet spot, you'll be pumping out hot laser death at previously unseen speeds. It also doesn't hurt that Compile's flair for crafting fast-paced and memorable shoot-'em-ups is on full display here, ensuring that this blaster is one of the finest available for Nintendo's 8-bit platform. The only downside is the extraordinary cost of purchasing a copy for yourself, as even loose American NES cartridges routinely pass the £150 mark.

NES Advantage Fact

■ The NES Advantage makes a memorable cameo during the climax of *Ghostbusters II*, as it was used to control the Statue Of Liberty as it walked through New York.

MAYHEM in MONSTERLAND

UNPAID ROYALTIES AND A FADING C64 SCENE CONVINCED JOHN AND STEVE ROWLANDS TO SELF-PUBLISH THEIR CREATURES 2 FOLLOW-UP. RORY MILNE LEARNS HOW THEY CREATED MONSTERLAND



IN THE KNOW

- » **PUBLISHER:** APEX COMPUTER PRODUCTIONS
- » **DEVELOPER:** STEVE AND JOHN ROWLANDS
- » **RELEASED:** 1993
- » **PLATFORM:** C64
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

The dealings that developers John and Steve Rowlands had with publisher Thalamus during the early Nineties is a story in and of itself. Suffice to say, that experience, coupled with declining demand for Commodore 64 games, persuaded the talented brothers to go down the self-publishing route for their next project. "We were chasing Thalamus for unpaid royalties when they went bankrupt, so we never received any royalties for either *Creatures* title," John begins. "After that, we decided to release the next game ourselves. The C64 market was reducing – everybody was going on to 16-bit – but we had a name for ourselves in the market. We wanted to produce something we were really proud of, and we didn't care if we only sold a fraction of the amount as we were going to get all the money."

Equally adept at creating hardcore shoot-'em-ups and cartoon-style platformers, the Rowlands team opted to keep working in the latter subgenre for its first self-published title. "By the time we had finished *Retrograde*, we had been in that zone for years doing



» [C64] A big green monster feels the business end of a speeding Mayhem's horn.

serious shooters," John reflects. "When we started developing *Creatures*, that was with the intention of going onto something cute. So we did *Creatures*, *Creatures 2*, and then we were still into doing something cute. And at the time, you obviously had Mario and you had Sonic. They were the big flagship characters."

But the Commodore 64 lacked a true 'flagship' character – big or otherwise – and so for inspiration the brothers looked to a bestselling novel that was being adapted to the silver screen at the time, as John reveals. "The success of *Jurassic Park* was a bit of an influence, but obviously it only came through: 'Where do we set this? What sort of environment do we set it in?' When it actually came to the look and the play, it had nothing to do with it; it was just a nice idea: 'Okay, let's make it a dinosaur game.'"

With a theme in place, the brothers dreamt up a world called Monsterland, and Steve got down to drafting sprites to depict its hero – a baby dinosaur called Mayhem, of which a high-resolution version was chosen. "I got him to sort of look like a dinosaur, and just pushed some pixels around. It took a while to get to the final design of him; he could be a chunky multicoloured sprite or multi-definition with a high-resolution sprite overlay."



» [C64] A baby dinosaur called Mayhem begins his mission to brighten up the drab hues of Monsterland.

Design concepts followed, which John describes as emerging from an organic process where basic ideas were fleshed out and refined through playtesting. "I think we had an idea at the start of the sort of road we could go down; there was a skeleton of an idea. As we developed it, and started playing what we were developing, ideas bounced around and all of a sudden the game started appearing in front of us."

But unlike any title that the Rowlands brothers had developed previously, the game now taking shape on their screens incorporated abstract geometry. John credits one popular platformer for influencing this look and a second for influencing the brothers' approach to gameplay. "*Mario* had geometric designs, so I think *Mario* was a bigger influence over the look of the game, but *Sonic* was probably a bigger influence over the gameplay. That was the whole intension of it at the start; you had these two games and we tried to deliver something for the C64, because it hadn't got that."

Further inspiration was sought as John and Steve devised a clever system that provided an overall objective for Mayhem by introducing duality into ▶

THE REMARKABLE ROWLANDS

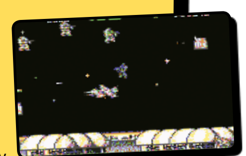
Selected titles from the Rowlands brothers' gameography

CYBERDYNE WARRIOR 1989



■ While blasting is required in *Cyberdyne Warrior*, this early Rowlands release is more platformer than shoot-'em-up. The game looks and plays a little like *Turrican* on first inspection, but its flick-screen format, smaller sprites and confined spaces make it unique. This is enhanced by the need to regularly top-up your warrior's time, energy and ammo.

RETROGRADE 1989



■ There's more to *Retrograde* than its *Defender*-like core design might suggest. The game's twist is that credits collected from fallen enemies can be used to buy upgrades to your character's initially underpowered gear. With enough funds, Planetbusters can be purchased, which give access to vertically-scrolling platformer sections guarded by huge bosses.

CREATURES 1990



■ Visually, *Creatures* marks the Rowlands' move from serious to seriously cute. However, this run-and-gunner contains elements that are anything but. As well as a fire-breathing hero, *Creatures* also ends levels with torture-themed set-pieces. Besides being gory, these grizzly challenges are as fiendishly tough as the game's main stages.

CREATURES 2 1992

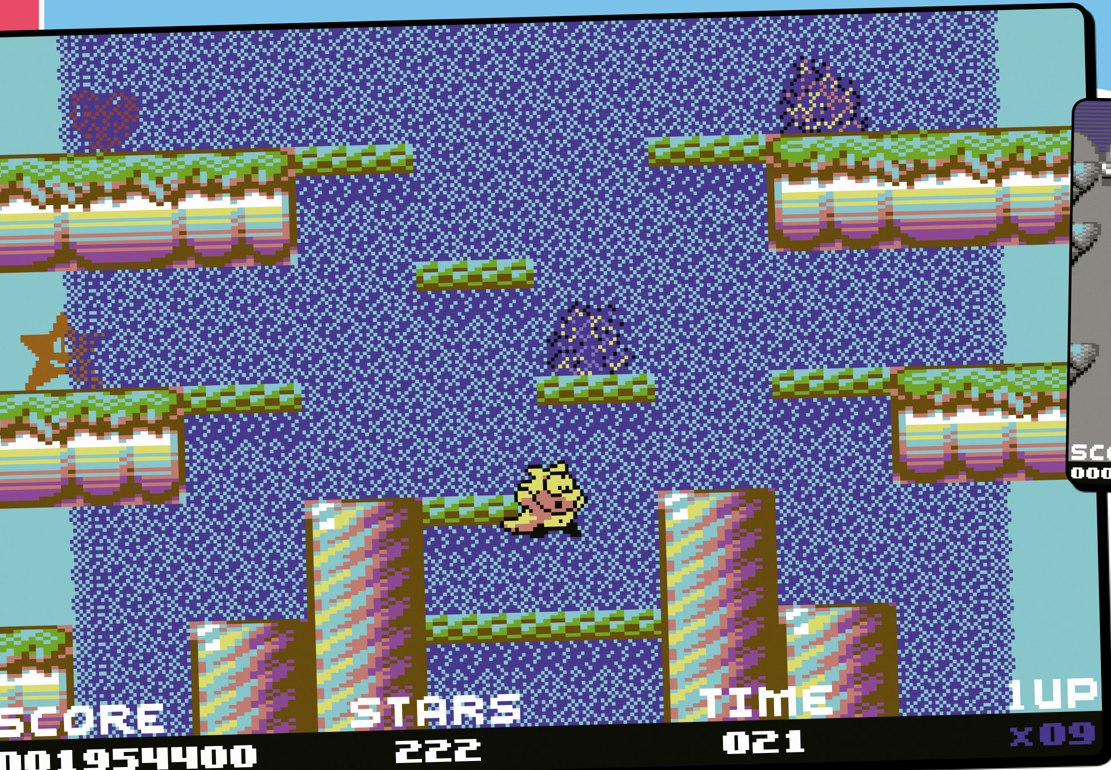


■ For the *Creatures* sequel, the Rowlands took the torture scenes from their original game as their starting point, adapted these into rescue missions and then interspersed them with agility tests and testing encounters with screen-sized bosses. Intermissions aside, *Creatures 2* provides a series of compelling memory tests that require perfect timing.

MAT HOFFMAN'S PRO BMX 2 2002



■ The fourth and final BMX title that the Rowlands worked on, and the most accomplished, *Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX 2* utilises button and direction-pad combinations in order to perform various stunts. Although the combos required for each stunt are displayed, they're tricky to pull off, which ensures that this is as challenging as any of the Rowlands' games.

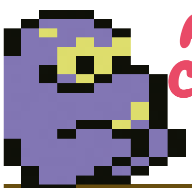


» [C64] A momentary loss of concentration under a Rockland waterfall costs Mayhem a precious life.



» [C64] Having run past an arch to mark his restart point, Mayhem collects a few stars.

> **"Wizball was the inspiration for how we started it off black and white and coloured it in"**
>
> John Rowlands



his environment. "We had come up with the idea of having this 'happy' and 'sad' world," John remembers. "*Wizball* was the inspiration for how we started it off black and white and coloured it in. But with *Wizball*, it got coloured and you moved on with no change to the gameplay, we wanted to change the way Mayhem played once it had changed its mode."

Of course, the logistics of how Mayhem would cheer up Monsterland remained, and so Steve littered the plucky little dinosaur's world with collectible bags of magic dust and gave him a best friend called Theo. "The magic dust came from us wanting to do the happy and sad thing, but how did we transition between them? So you've got to have the magic dust, then Theo Saurus does his thing with the magic and then things change."

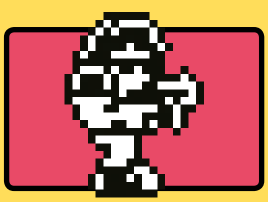
But rather than creating Theo Saurus from scratch, John recalls him being rescued from a batch of abandoned projects that the team had previously let their imaginations run riot on. "They were almost like sub-games, he says." Theo Saurus was the only thing that we recycled from those – the little dinosaur, and he was just a very small part really; he was there after each stage." Steve adds: "*Mayhem* was all dinosaurs anyway, so it was a natural thing to do. But it's not like we had a design for the Theo Saurus game, other than a big dinosaur stomping on villagers! I think it was the name, pretty much, that we took to *Mayhem*."

As well as reimagining Theo, Steve also ensured that *Monsterland* lived up to its name by creating a wealth of increasingly challenging monsters for Mayhem to encounter. "Every new level I had a whole new set of characters to design, and they got progressively harder. There were three or four normal monsters and one or two double-sized ones every level – one of my favourites was the black cucumber one!"

Besides looking different from one another, Steve's monsters also all behaved differently, which John puts down to their game's use of multiload. "It was a

HOME COMPUTER HEROES

More stars of Nineties home computer platformers

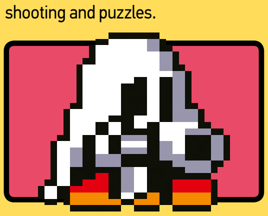


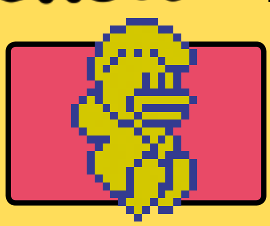
SUPERKID

■ The original Spectrum *Superkid* games reviewed well, but were largely overlooked. This is a shame, as they provide undemanding fun. Admittedly, *Superkid* lacks replay value, but *Superkid In Space* cleverly riffs on *Exolon*, and *Skatin' USA* offers nicely skewed platforming.

BLINKY THE GHOST

■ Blinky the platforming ghost didn't do anything revolutionary, but his capers won plaudits across formats. *Blinky's Scary School* is a collect-'em-up, but the more accomplished *Titanic Blinky* mixes platforming with shooting and puzzles.





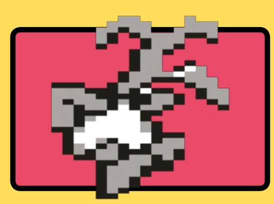
EDD THE DUCK

■ Despite being an irritating puppet on children's TV, Edd The Duck's videogame is actually pretty decent. Although it channels *Rainbow Islands*, Zeppelin's vibrant vertical platformer is very much an original title, which revolves around amassing stars and freezing foes.

CJ THE ELEPHANT

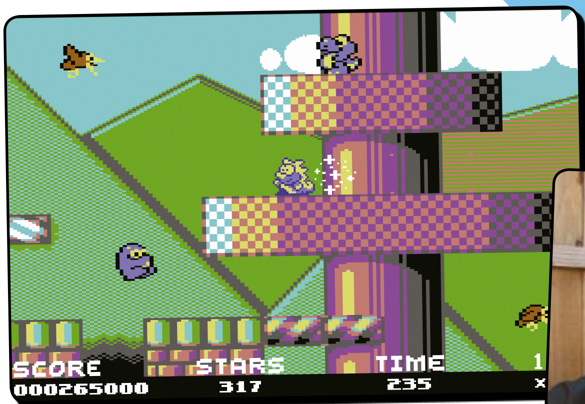
■ Dave Clarke and Jonathan Smyth were something of a C64 hits machine, with their two *CJ* platformers arguably being their best-remembered titles. *Elephant Antics* and *CJ In The USA* offer compelling two-player challenges.





NOBBY THE AARDVARK

■ Most C64 platformers fall short of *Mayhem In Monsterland*, but *Nobby The Aardvark* is arguably an exception. As well as tricky platforming, the aardvark must also pilot everything from a hot-air balloon to a submarine.



» [C64] An invincibility power-up allows Mayhem to dispatch multiple foes at breakneck speed.



» Designer/coder John Rowlands (left) and designer/artist/musician Steve Rowlands (right).

multiload title as we were getting inspired by console games and we couldn't fit everything into 64K. We wouldn't just load in the background graphics, we would load in the full sprite-bank as well, so we would fill it up. And the ideas we were having necessitated monsters with different abilities."

As to why Steve created huge monsters using the C64's expanded-sprite capability, as well as foes of a similar scale to Mayhem, the developer cites screen presence and efficiency as motivators. "It was just to give the impact on the screen. We needed big monsters, and rather than unnecessarily build them up out of loads of normal-res sprites, we had two double-sized sprites." John cites necessity as the reason for Mayhem's low-res, outsized foes exploiting the C64's clever sprite hardware. "Okay, they looked chunky. But they came about because we didn't have the memory – or sometimes the onscreen sprites."

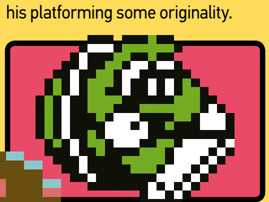
But given Mayhem's numerous foes – both big and small – it seemed only fair that the brothers give their baby dinosaur some offensive moves. Steve recollects a console favourite and John's need for speed inspiring two quite distinct attacks. "Because Mario had the jump attack, we had to do that – it was a basic platformer thing. Then once we got the fast scrolling working you were never going to be able to see what was coming. That was when, from a gameplay point of view, Mayhem had to be doing something where he was killing things – because [otherwise] he could die before the screen caught up. So that's how the charge attack came about."

On the need for the Jurassic hero's charge attack, John concedes that even he was surprised at the speed that he got Mayhem zooming around at. "You had other fast games, like *Uridium*, but it wasn't anywhere as near as fast. But when we were designing *Mayhem In Monsterland*, we were thinking that was how fast it was going to be – maybe a bit faster. But when we actually developed it, it was like: 'Whoa! Hold on. Mayhem needs to be protected.'"

But in order to get the maximum impact from the attack, the brothers decided to throttle Mayhem's velocity on their game's first level by withholding his charge and making it a level two power-up, as John explains. "The point of the players collecting the charge ability when they had completed the first sad stage and gone into the first happy stage was that they had spent 20 minutes, half an hour, playing the game at that speed. Then by introducing them to that ability it was like: 'Wow!' So it was getting them used to what they thought was the game's speed and then whacking it right up." ▶

TURBO THE TORTOISE

■ Visual Impact clearly took inspiration from Mario when designing Turbo; the tortoise lives in a colourful world and he jumps on his foes to dispatch them. He also time travels, however, which lends his platforming some originality.



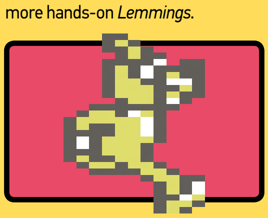


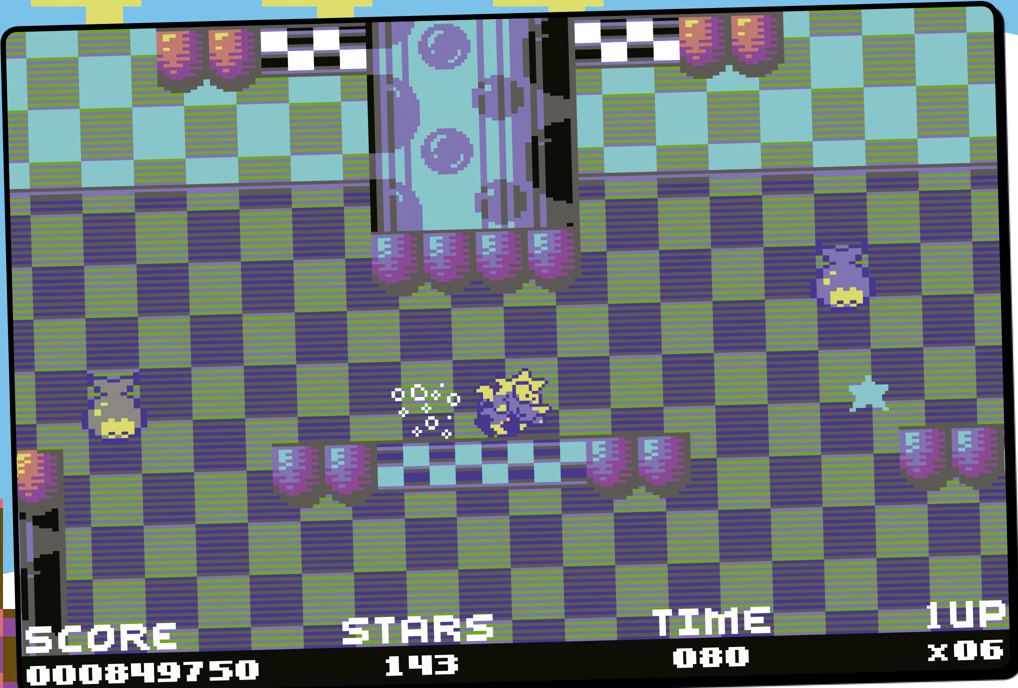
THE TROLL

■ Inspired by a fad for spiky-haired dolls, the Troll starred in a top-notch C64 platformer unimaginatively titled *Trolls*. The game's blindingly fast four-way scrolling does initially cause frustration, but patience is rewarded with a series of cleverly constructed levels.

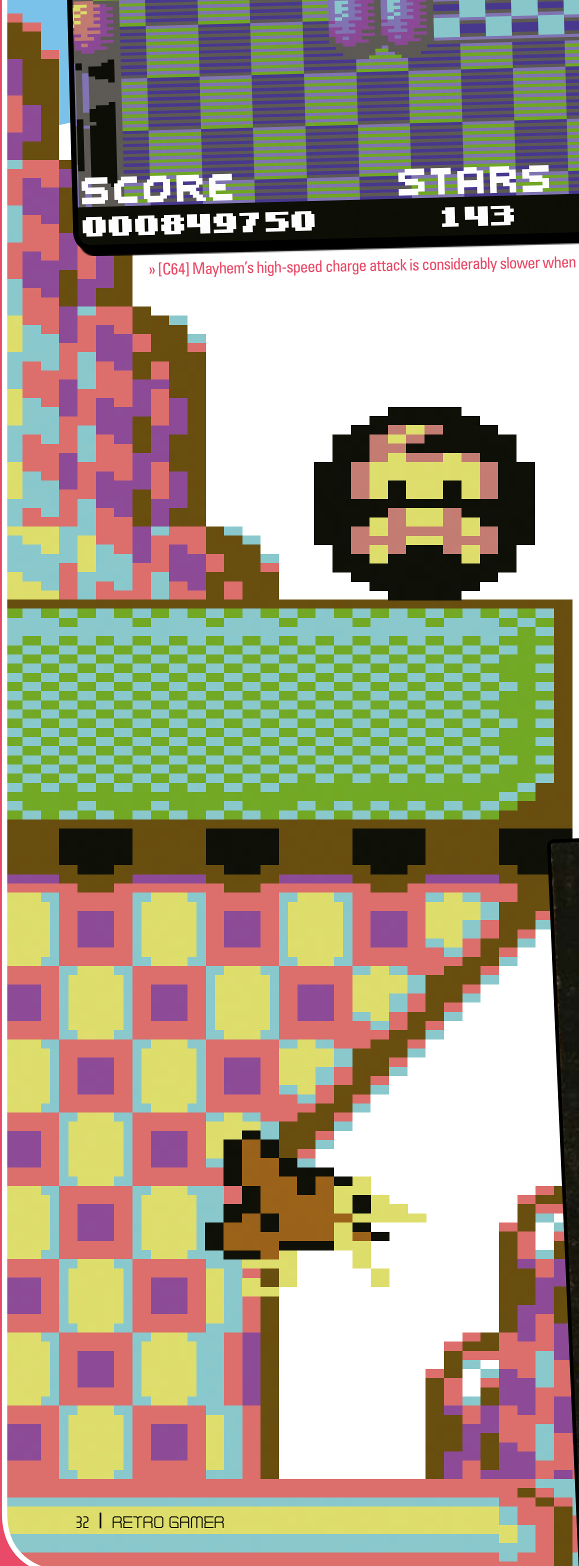
RALPH THE DOG

■ Faithful Ralph's attempts to safely guide his sleepwalking owner Lee on a jaunt around town provides the premise for Ocean's final C64 game *Sleepwalker*. The publisher's swan song is an attractive scrolling platformer that plays a little like a more hands-on *Lemmings*.





» [C64] Mayhem's high-speed charge attack is considerably slower when performed in underwater sections.



"We were trying to encourage players to explore and not just take things at face value"

John Rowlands

One downside of Mayhem's charge, however, was that it let him take out any opponents in his path, which made it pointless to give the game's big foes huge hit-counts, as Steve acknowledges. "In charge mode, Mayhem was pretty much invincible, apart from falling into gaps. So if you could stay up on the platforms you could just kill everything. It's just that you had to know the level layout before you got to the big monsters so you could charge them."

But in order to make their game more than a high-speed monster mash, the Rowlands brothers hid bonuses, such as extra lives and time, around Monsterland. "We were trying to encourage players to explore a bit and not just take things at face value," John reasons. "It wasn't just charging around at 100 miles per hour, it had elements of exploring and being rewarded for that. And also at that speed you would be missing out things in the landscape that went past in a blur if you were charging."

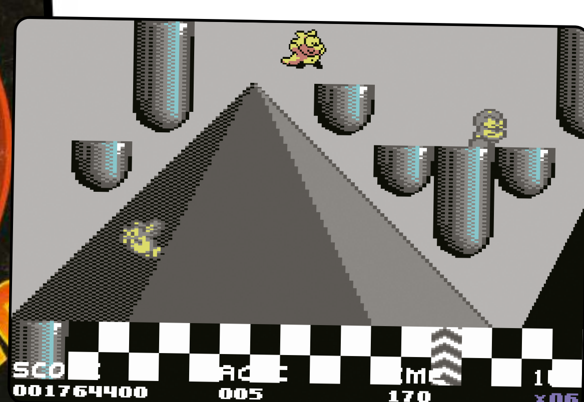


Another consideration for the brothers was their game's soundtrack, which Steve remembers using to give audio cues to reflect the nature of *Mayhem*'s upcoming challenges. "We just wanted to make it reflect the area you were in. So if you were going towards something it would impact what was coming up. A whole section would have slow stuff, say, and when you came up to it, it would change into slow music. So you knew you should be taking it a bit easy and not be charging around."

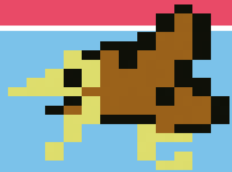
An equally innovative system came in the form of optional, rather than obligatory, restart points, although John views these more as an evolution. "With *Creatures*, we had the restart points fixed; with *Mayhem*, it was taken to the next level. And playing *Mario*, at the time, sometimes could feel frustrating. You would die and then you were *all* the way over there. So we wanted to avoid that."

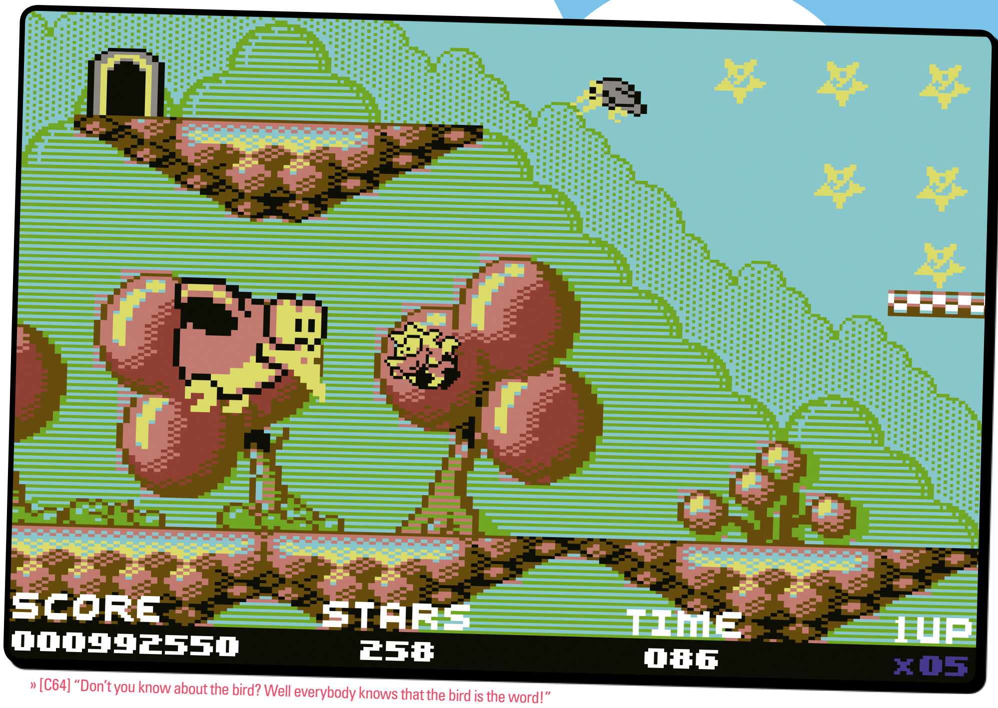
The brothers also devised a novel ending for the colourful versions of their game's levels, where Mayhem was required to run – or skilfully skid – over a chequered section in order to complete them. "A lot of people would just run across the line," Steve notes. "It was hard to time the skid to get across them, but it was something to do right at the end. Another little bonus." John adds: "And the chequered line – the look of that – was easy to identify. Whatever the world looked like, as soon as you saw the black and white checks you knew that was where you had to go to. And obviously you saw it in sad versions of the levels, so you thought: 'Right, I know when I complete the happy version where I'm going to.'"

Final touches to the Rowlands' seemingly ever-evolving game, by this stage known as *Mayhem In Monsterland*, included atmospheric pre-level animations depicting forthcoming terrains. "The 'Get



» [C64] Mayhem bounces on the back of a passing owl in order to reach a high platform.





» [C64] "Don't you know about the bird? Well everybody knows that the bird is the word!"

Ready' screen was actually afforded a little bit of memory!" John enthuses. "So we went through quite a few different ideas for that. Then we hit on a little parallax-scrolling window with lightning or whatever. So there was always a lot of throwing out of ideas, you had to be willing to invest time and effort before saying: 'No, that doesn't work – bin it.'"

The Rowlands also invested time and effort playtesting their game, with the result that they ended up as expert players of their increasingly challenging platformer. "Because it was the title that we playtested and refined the most, we got quite good at it," John says modestly. "And as a side-effect of that we released a game that most other people took a long time to get good at." On reflection, Steve views *Mayhem In Monsterland*'s difficulty as being reasonable: "Some levels were harder than others, and some sections of levels were harder than others – as with all sprite-based platformers. But we could do it, and coming up to the end of the game we wanted to give players a challenge."

Difficulty curve aside, *Mayhem In Monsterland* was released to unanimous acclaim, with one review famously giving the game a 100% overall rating. "At the time, we were ecstatic – we got very drunk!" John says of *Mayhem*'s perfect score in *Commodore Format*. "It was only afterwards we started to think that it could actually have a negative impact on the perception of the game. But I don't think it hindered sales, and because we released it ourselves we were essentially on a hundred percent royalty."

With the benefit of hindsight, Steve Rowlands now views *Mayhem* as a job well done and a project he very much enjoyed working on. "I'm pleased with *Mayhem*; it was how we wanted it, other than it being a bit hard to play. I remember it being a pretty good time." John Rowlands is frustrated that *Mayhem In Monsterland* is often remembered for a decades-old percentage score, but he only has fond memories of its development and dreams of someday creating a full sequel. "Over the years it's been controversial because of the 100% score, and it's taken a little bit away from all its achievements. But every couple of years, I have dreams that we're back working on a sequel, because it was my favourite game. Those days on *Mayhem* were the most creative, free days we ever had." *

Many thanks to John and Steve Rowlands for returning to Monsterland.



MAYHEM'S MAGIC DUST

The Mayhem sequel that you've likely never played

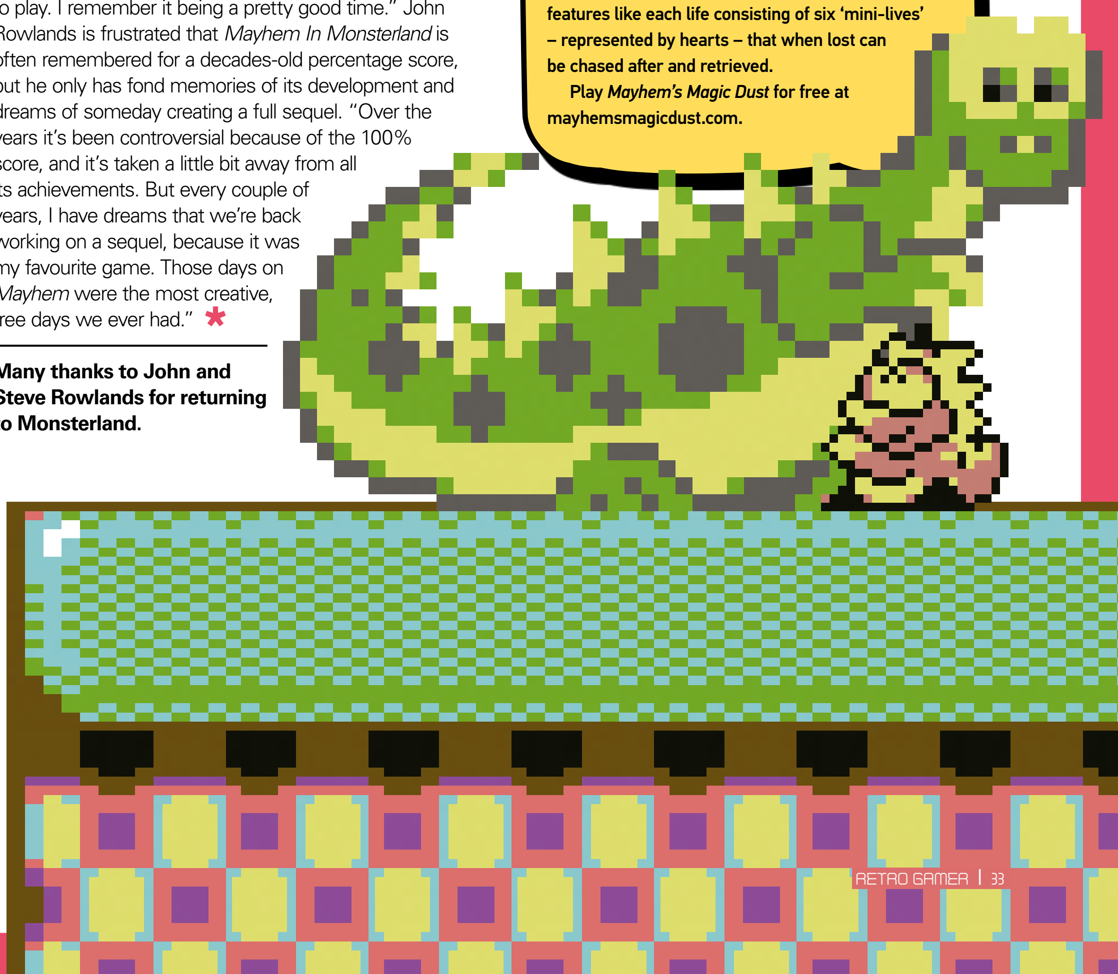


Despite the 11-year gap between *Mayhem In Monsterland* and the initial incarnation of its sequel *Mayhem's Magic Dust*, Steve Rowlands and Robin Ellis's mobile and browser-based follow-up is remarkably faithful to its predecessor in terms of both visuals and level of challenge.

Due to *Magic Dust*'s smartphone origins, Mayhem's return sees him restricted to a small number of actions; he can walk, jump, and duck. Mayhem's second outing also proceeds at a far more sedate pace than his first. But this is no bad thing, as the dinosaur's quest for magic dust is all about accuracy. Mayhem has to jump on the heads of opponents while avoiding the business ends of their spikes and beaks. The reward for pulling this off a set number of times is a bag – or bags – of magic dust, which when collected provide Mayhem with Star Strike power-ups. These are essential when it comes to taking down *Magic Dust*'s seven bosses. A single Star Strike will deplete a boss's energy bar far more successfully than a standard jump, but multiple Star Strikes can be chained together to devastating effect.

Enhancing *Magic Dust*'s superlative core design are mechanics inherited from Monsterland, such as rainbow gates to set restart points, and fresh features like each life consisting of six 'mini-lives' – represented by hearts – that when lost can be chased after and retrieved.

Play *Mayhem's Magic Dust* for free at mayhemsmagicdust.com.





CLASSIC MOMENTS

Phoenix

» **PLATFORM:** ARCADE » **DEVELOPER:** CENTURI/TAITO » **RELEASED:** 1980

Few moments in arcade videogames are as impactful as meeting the gigantic mothership in the Centuri-published *Phoenix* for the first time. First, you have to deal with waves of alien birds across two stages, and then you have to deal with the larger Phoenixes that hatch from eggs and fire down relentless streams of bullets at you. Pass those and you're faced with an alien safely ensconced in a seemingly impenetrable ship that you need to continually shoot at. Needless to say, when you finally defeat your alien foe the satisfaction is immense. Congratulations, you've just destroyed one of gaming's earliest bosses. *

MORE CLASSIC PHOENIX MOMENTS

Shoot the stomach



The third and fourth stages of *Phoenix* has you encountering large eagle-like Phoenixes that hatch from eggs and transform into deadly killer birds that do their best to turn your ship into a smouldering wreck. Shooting off the wings simply cause them to regenerate, meaning you need a direct hit on their bellies to split them in half so you can finish your quest.

Shields up!



One of the mechanics that set *Phoenix* apart from other shooters at the time was its shield, which enabled you to absorb enemy bullets for a few precious moments. While it's typically used as a defence mechanism, if you're feeling ballsy you can use it as a weapon, raising it at just the right moment so that an enemy ship flies straight into it. Blam!

BIO

Apparently, no one knows the developer that was responsible for creating *Phoenix*. What we do know is that Centuri and Taito published the game in arcades with Atari taking control of the sole home conversion for the Atari 2600. Similar in style to *Gorf*, *Phoenix* tasks you with shooting your way through a number of distinctly different stages before you finally encountered one of the first bosses to ever appear in a videogame. Needless to say it's a memory that would stay with you forever.

ULTIMATE GUIDE TO Moon

1982 WAS A BIG YEAR IN THE ARCADES. TITLES SUCH AS SCRAMBLE HAD SET THE TONE, BUT A NEW GENERATION OF GAMES WERE PUSHING THE LIMITS. STRAP IN TO YOUR BUGGY, IT'S TIME FOR A MOON PATROL!

It's a tough life being a police officer in the Luna City police force. Far away from home, stuck on the inhospitable satellite, things are bad enough before you're assigned to Sector Nine, home of some of the most dangerous criminals in the solar system. Fortunately you have help. Fortunately, you have a state-of-the-art, six-wheeled moon buggy.

Moon Patrol's bespoke buggy is a technological marvel. Especially adapted to cope with the rough demands of the moon's surface, it has three extra shock-absorbent axles that are adept at cruising over the consistently bumpy surface.



» [Arcade] *Moon Patrol*'s city, sweetly lit up on one side by the sun.

Its six wheels also have a special power – they can propel the buggy into the air, useful for straddling the many craters and other hazards on the surface, the buggy seemingly hanging in the air in the low gravity of the moon. Finally, the vehicle is well armed, too. In addition to a forward-pointing cannon, it can simultaneously shoot multiple missiles upwards. And these weapons are going to come in very useful, for the villains of the sector own a vast fleet of flying saucers and other spacecraft with which to try and eliminate our valiant police officer. Two of these, the regular spaceship and a flying saucer, drop missiles which can either be shot or dodged. The third, a strange collection of constantly-shifting orbs, drop powerful bombs in front of the buggy, creating new craters in the process. Clearly, this dedicated patrolman has one hell of a job in front of them. But that's not all: there are also ▶

Patrol

SHOOT FOR THE MOON

How to survive your excursion onto the satellite



A ROLLING STONE

■ Several inclines pepper the moon landscape, and while they contain no craters, rolling rocks of various sizes must be negotiated. Most simply, they require blasting, but often quick-wheeled jumping is required, too, and there are some *horrible* combinations of rock in the latter levels.



ENEMY MINE

■ One touch of these glowing mines and it's wheels everywhere for our brave moon buggy. Naturally, they must be approached with caution, and the spacing of the mines is often demonically narrow. The layouts can be conquered first time by taking it slow and manipulating the buggy mid-air.

CRATER MAKERS

■ These triangular swines drop powerful bombs in front of the buggy that leave lethal craters. They can be extremely troublesome on later levels when they swarm with the other UFOs, so aim to take them out as quickly as possible in order to avoid a chaotic and explosive demise.



JUMPING FOR JOY

■ Jumping in *Moon Patrol* is not only beautifully smooth, but also a vital defence against the moon surface. Mastering the different pace of jumps, and even controlling the buggy mid-air is vital if you are to survive. And resist the temptation to jump unnecessarily as you never know what's coming!





DEATH FROM ABOVE

■ The other two UFOs drop slower bombs that are aimed at the buggy itself, and can be shot down by an expert marksman. However, in later levels when the UFOs mass above, a combination of shooting and evasion must be utilised to ensure survival, and the best way is to alternate your speed.



KNOW YOUR ROCKS

■ As dangerous as the UFOs are, the moon's surface causes just as much grief. How you approach each type of rock is key: small ones cannot be easily shot and must be straddled. Larger ones can be jumped, but often are doubled up, making this tough. In which case, you'd better just open fire.

COLECO CURIOSITY

We talk to Matthew Householder, author of the completed, but originally unreleased, Colecovision port of Moon Patrol



So how did you get involved with *Moon Patrol*?

I had been hired by Atari to join their in-house ColecoVision game development group. Atarisoft [the division of Atari that published games on non-Atari systems] was our publishing label and I was assigned to convert the arcade game *Vanguard*. I spent a month learning the Colecovision hardware and ZAX Z80 development system and during that time I designed a software-scrolling background engine to use with the *Vanguard* port as the Colecovision has no hardware scrolling. Then, in September 1983, I was told to drop that and convert *Moon Patrol* instead.

What did you think of *Moon Patrol*?

I was happier, as it was a better game, but realised it would be more challenging work, too. A machine soon turned up in our office. No source code or graphics were provided, but I had the keys to the machine and its operator manual. I played it for several hours a day until I could get through the beginner course and most of the championship course. Then I set the DIP switches to allow me to pause the machine as I played in 'God' mode, allowing me to reverse engineer how far apart the craters were, how may UFOs there were, how they behaved, how high the buggy jumped, and so on. I employed the sophisticated tools of a pencil, pad of paper and ruler.

How long did it take?

Through to March 1984. I wrote the code, created the sound effects and drew the graphics. All the art was done on graph paper and then converted by eye into hexadecimal as I typed it into the assembly source code files.

Did you change the game at all?

I added some personal touches. I modelled the first section's graphics on my ride to work which included a series of seemingly-endless foothills and a coastal mountain range. I also redesigned the cityscape to have a more modern 'Jetsons' feel to it rather than the naturalistic, organic sprites of the original. It used fewer graphic elements that way, and I preferred the look, too. The exploding buggy is more elaborate too, with a little mini mushroom cloud that morphs into a skull as it collapses.

Sounds like fun! What happened then – why was the game unreleased?

Throughout my employment, it was rumoured Atari had been losing more than $1 million dollars a day. Rumours were spreading that no more Atarisoft titles would be published after some unnamed title, so I slapped a quick title screen on it and submitted it to testing. But then it stalled, and in May 1984 Atarisoft was closed. Fortunately, I kept the ROM image and my design documents and then made a few quick art changes. In 2014, a reconstructed version of *Moon Patrol* was manufactured and distributed to a handful of fans. I have a copy.



» [ColecoVision] The ColecoVision version of *Moon Patrol* surfaced in 2014.

> **"I played it for several hours a day until I could get through the beginner course"**
> Matthew Householder

▶ enemies on the ground, in the form of bright yellow tanks and flying cars. These must be either shot or jumped over, otherwise its curtains for your valiant hero. Even worse, the devils have placed landmines within certain sectors, and have a propensity for rolling rocks down at the buggy whenever it climbs an incline. The moon is fighting you, too: some craters are occupied by volcano-esque plants that try to grab the buggy as it flies over them. This is no ordinary patrol.

M*oon Patrol* was released in arcades in 1982 by Irem, with Williams handling distribution in the west. Generally assumed to have been designed by Takashi Nishiyama (*Kung-Fu Master*), it, along with Taito's *Jungle Hunt*, is one of the first side-on games to contain parallax scrolling. Each of the three levels of gameplay scroll at a different rate, giving an excellent impression of depth, despite the fact that the majority of the action takes place at the bottom of the screen. The game contains five stages which are made up of a series of checkpoints based on the alphabet. Each stage comprises of five letters (except for the last, which has the extra letter) and these checkpoints mark not only the player's progress, but also the restart point should a buggy be destroyed. The display above the action screen contains the data you'd expect (timeline style map, score, number of lives left) as well as three coloured indicators that warn the player of incoming hazards. The top light indicates



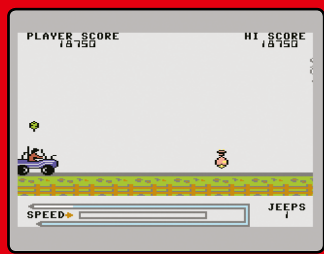
CLONE KILLERS

Can't afford/be bothered with an official licence? Just tweak the game and away you go!



MOON ALERT
ZX SPECTRUM

■ This early game from Ocean Software copied the template laid down by the arcade game and added a few elements of its own. The buggy is now escaping from a crash rocket and there are troughs that must be jumped in and out of, as well as some newly-designed enemies.



JEEP COMMAND
COMMODORE 64

■ Unlike the Spectrum, the Commodore 64 actually did get an official conversion, but that didn't stop the clones. Replacing the buggy with a jeep and the moon with Earth disguises this effort but its origins are still obvious. Gameplay tweaks include no upward fire but a useful rear cannon.



MOON BUGGY
COMMODORE 64

■ Anirog's *Moon Patrol* clone was brazen in its lack of any major changes beyond the technical restrictions of the Commodore 16 hardware. It's actually a fair representation of the arcade game, although the buggy itself is oddly avian in shape, and its gunfire sound effect quickly gets *very* irritating.



CASEY JONES
ZX SPECTRUM

■ Now this *is* strange. *Casey Jones* is so obviously a *Moon Patrol* clone, yet it replaces the famous buggy with… a train! Fortunately, this antique locomotive can still jump and fire, but the game is ridiculously tough, despite some nicely bizarre enemies in the mould of *Jet Set Willy*.

impending attacks from above, the middle one of mines ahead, and the final light of an imminent attack from behind. At the end of each stage, the player is rewarded for their speediness in crossing the level with bonus points awarded for every second under the average time for the stage. A combination of speed, dexterity and shooting skill is essential in order to obtain the best bonus.

Most of the hazards in *Moon Patrol* can be dealt with either by dodging them or shooting them. The commonest threat is your basic stationary rock; stupid and ugly, but damn painful if you crash into it. These fall into three categories: the standard large rock which takes one shot, or can be jumped over; a 'double' version of this that requires two shots, and can also be jumped over, albeit carefully. And a small tiny rock, that despite its size, can shred the moon buggy's tyres and chassis to bits; unfortunately, these are often ▶



» The arcade flyer for *Moon Patrol* looks suitably epic and makes you excited to play the game.

CONVERSION CAPERS



APPLE II

■ A propensity for the action to slow down when the screen gets busy and a rather jarring tune ruins what is otherwise a competent port. The buggy looks good and the levels are represented well. And, like the original itself, the hit detection is a little off, sometimes to the player's advantage!



COLECOVISION

■ Matthew Householder's ColecoVision game finally saw the light of day a few years ago and is an admirable port, making it a shame it wasn't released back in the day. Despite some 'odd' graphics, it copies the arcade game well. The moon city has a more modern look to it as well.



SORD M5

■ Outside of the arcade game, this version on the Sord M5 computer boasts the jolliest rendition of *Moon Patrol*'s theme tune. Published (apparently legitimately, considering it mentions Irem on the front cover) by Takara, it's also a respectable take on the game albeit with some creative level design.

ATARI 2600

■ This is a decent conversion that plays well. The buggy itself may not much resemble its arcade parent (it's sleeker here), but many of the game's elements remain, although the similarity of the enemy bombs to the player's own missiles doesn't help survival. Oh, and the rocks look like doggy poo.



COMMODORE 64

■ This C64 port is an excellent game, despite lacking some graphical finesse. While it lacks the city backdrop, the parallax scrolling is emulated well, the buggy is easy to control, and the action is fast and furious. Just as rock hard as the arcade original, this is great blasting fun with some meaty sound effects.



TI-99/4A

■ Okay, so it's a little cute buggy; apart from this strange departure from the original, though this is a reasonably faithful port on the Texas Instruments computer. Again, the screen seems cramped and the high score table is at the bottom instead of top, but otherwise a decent attempt at recreating the lunar spills.





ATARI 5200

■ Apart from an ugly attempt at interpreting the iconic buggy, this is a neat version of *Moon Patrol*. The graphics, especially the mountainous backdrops, are close to superior to the arcade original and the game moves at a very quick pace, retaining many frustrations as well. But that buggy… ugh.



GAME BOY COLOR

■ Released as part of a double arcade hits compilation along with *Spy Hunter*, the Game Boy Color proved adept at converting both games, despite a predictable lack of clarity in the sound department. Otherwise, it's well-presented and a nice throwaway blaster for the system.



VIC-20

■ There's little to recommend in Atarisoft's Vic-20 port of *Moon Patrol*. Most of the background scenery has gone and the gameplay is too slow and cramped to be truly enjoyable. Plus the buggy makes a horrible chugging sound that we really could have done without.

ATARI 8-BIT

■ While maybe not as fast as the Atari 5200 version, that fact helped *Moon Patrol* on the 8-bit Atari in the playability stakes. It's still a tough game, however, but fun to play despite lacking certain graphical resemblances to the original, although there's a pleasant attempt at the cityscape and parallax scrolling.



MSX

■ While it introduces a few extra elements, such as a buggy driver popping out of the ice-white vehicle every time it crashes, the MSX version struggles to reproduce the pace and excitement of the arcade original. A garish yellow city and some juddery scrolling don't help things, either.



ZX SPECTRUM

■ This unreleased port to the ZX Spectrum has been recovered recently and is available online. Visually it looks good, but it plays so slowly that virtually every iota of fun is sucked out of the game. This probably went unreleased due to Atarisoft's withdrawal from the Spectrum market.





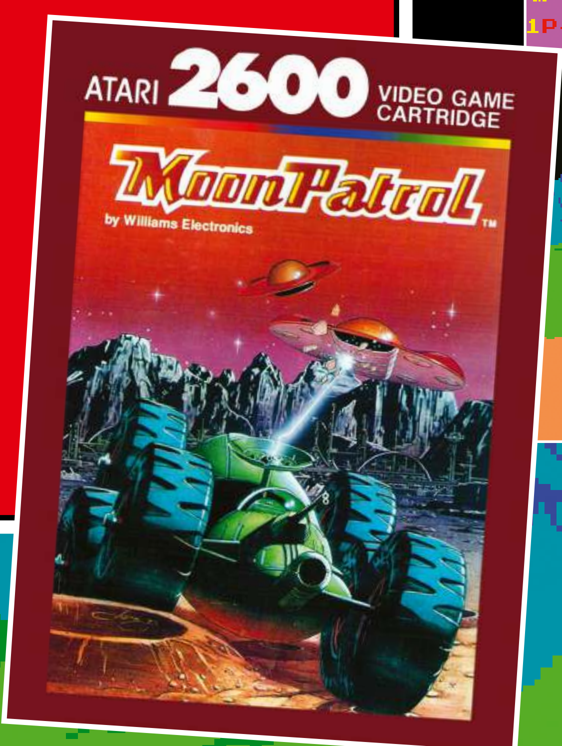
ATARI ST

■ Converting a five-year-old arcade game to the new 16-bit computer must have seemed like a good idea to *someone*. It's a competent conversion and almost arcade perfect, however it is slow in parts. Why you'd want to play an ancient arcade game on your brand-new 16-bit computer is another thing…



PC

■ Like the VIC-20 version, the PC abandons all pretence of trying to copy the arcade original's innovative parallax scrolling. Instead we get a dotted line, an oversized buggy and a very Mars-like moon. Farty sound effects and flickery sprites make it one to miss.

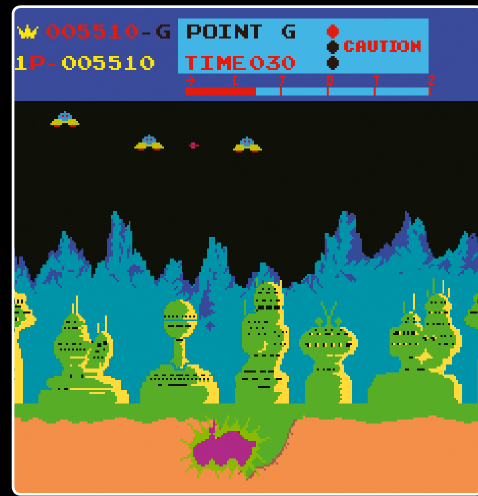


too low to be destroyed by the vehicle's front cannon. Craters also pepper the landscape and there's no choice here: they must be jumped over, and even glancing one trailing tyre into a crater can cause the buggy to fall into the hole and explode. Landmines must also be jumped, and their spacing is increasingly perilous, requiring precise judgment and a sensible speed in order to land the buggy in time to jump off again, thus avoiding the next waiting mine. Stationary tanks offer less threat than the aerial enemies but are often awkwardly placed, and they always seem to manage to loose off one shot before the buggy can take them out. And, finally, there's possibly the easiest enemy, the flying car. Hovering behind the buggy, this unarmed vehicle waits for a few moments before jetting forwards, seemingly unconcerned of the potentially self-destructive collision ahead. The car must be jumped over before an optional forward cannon shot nets the player a neat (and simple) bonus.

Like many arcade machines of the era, *Moon Patrol* is a score-attack game at heart, although one with an unusual continue option. Should the player lose all their buggies, they can continue, as normal, by feeding the coin-op more coins. We can't recall many other arcade games which then retains the player's score after continuing, making the high score table more a battle of the richest, than the most skilful. Eventually, after completing the first beginner course, there's a somewhat incongruously-named championship course, which then loops continuously. Seems there are a lot of nasty people up on the moon.

As an early arcade game, home ports of *Moon Patrol* were inevitably slow to appear, with the





» [Arcade] The buggy is just about to explode having fallen into this cavernous crater.

> **"I redesigned the cityscape to have a more modern 'Jetsons' feel to it"**
> Matthew Householder

majority of them handled by Atari and Atarisoft. This predictably meant the game appeared on most of Atari's home formats including the 2600, 5200 and 8-bit computers. Elsewhere, an Atarisoft port was released for the Commodore 64, VIC-20 and PC, and there was even an Atari ST version several years later that was aptly subtitled *A Lunar Combat Mission*. The ZX Spectrum missed out, although a port was completed by Atarisoft, but never published, for reasons unclear. Never mind: like many of its peers, *Moon Patrol* received the honour of several unofficial clones, of which Ocean Software's *Moon Buggy* was possibly the best.

While it may not be as famous as *Space Invaders* or *Pac-Man*, *Moon Patrol* is a solid entry in the history of arcade games. Presenting technological innovation in its parallax scrolling, the simple-yet-devious gameplay ensured the machines consumed a vast quantity of coins from the pockets of eager virtual Luna City police officers.



EDITOR'S CHOICE

Popils: The Blockbusting Challenge

This block-punching puzzle game was originally intended to come to a variety of platforms, including PC Engine and Famicom, but Tengen only ever released it for Sega's handheld platform, making it one of the few great Game Gear exclusives. The game is the brainchild of *Bubble Bobble* designer Fukio Mitsuji, and contains 100 levels in which your goal is to rescue the princess. Unfortunately walls, portals, spikes, bats and slime monsters stand in your way, making for a brain-busting challenge. And if you somehow finish all of those, there's an edit mode which allows you to make your own levels.



Game Gear

» MANUFACTURER: Sega **» YEAR:** 1990 **» COST:** £99 (launch), £40+ (today)

Sega was late to enter the handheld market, arriving a year after Atari's Lynx and Nintendo's Game Boy hit the shelves, and the company clearly chose to save time by retooling existing technology rather than starting from scratch. Externally, the bulky machine has an unremarkable design with an odd circular d-pad, three buttons (including Start) and a 3.2-inch screen. However, internally the Game Gear is heavily based on that of the Master System home console, with the addition of a new video mode that trades a lower resolution for a wider range of colours.

The result of this decision was a system that was caught between its competitors – it couldn't match the Lynx for technical wizardry like sprite scaling, and the Game Boy easily outlasted its battery consumption rate of six AA batteries roughly every four hours. While it couldn't best Nintendo's machine, Sega comfortably outpaced the Lynx thanks to superior marketing and third party support, racking up over 10 million sales. Despite this contemporary popularity, the Game Gear receives relatively little love today due to hosting few high-quality exclusive games, as well as a high long-term failure rate caused by the use of low-quality capacitors. *





Game Gear fact

■ A Game Gear equivalent of the Super Game Boy is impossible on the Mega Drive, as the Game Gear's palette of 4,096 colours dwarfs the 512 available on the 16-bit machine.

RAM: 8KB MAIN, 16KB VIDEO
PROCESSOR: ZILOG Z80 8-BIT CPU (3.58 MHZ)
GRAPHICS: SEGA VDP (32 COLOURS – 4,096 PALETTE)
RESOLUTION: 160 X 144
AUDIO: SN76489 (FOUR-CHANNEL PSG)
MEDIA: ROM CARTRIDGE (1MB MAXIMUM)

ZX SPECTRUM

35 YEARS 35 GAMES



MORE THAN 10,000 GAMES HAVE BEEN RELEASED FOR THE ZX SPECTRUM AND THAT NUMBER GROWS EVERY SINGLE YEAR. AS IT CELEBRATES ITS 35TH ANNIVERSARY, MARTYN CARROLL SELECTS A KEY TITLE FROM EACH YEAR, FROM 1982 TO TODAY, HIGHLIGHTING THE SHEER DURABILITY OF THIS DIMINUTIVE MICRO

1982 THE HOBBIT

DEVELOPER: BEAM SOFTWARE **GENRE:** TEXT ADVENTURE

Were it not for *The Hobbit* the Spectrum's first year would have been forgettable as far as gaming goes. The reason for the lack of quality software early on is clear: the Spectrum officially launched in April 1982, yet Sinclair struggled to meet demand with some waiting for months for their machines to arrive. These delays meant that there wasn't a great deal of games software available this year, decent or otherwise. Quick arcade clones were the order of the day, and it was obvious that many were hastily updated versions of existing ZX81 releases. Sinclair's own label published some early hits like *Space Raiders* and *Hungry Horace* but they were simple, fleeting affairs. This begs the question: how did Philip Mitchell and Veronika Megler, authors of *The Hobbit* text adventure, create such a sophisticated title and have it ready so soon after the Spectrum's launch?

The pair actually began developing the game on the Tandy TRS-80, but when Beam Software witnessed the clamour for the Spectrum it shifted the development over. An added benefit of the move was that it allowed for colour location graphics to accompany the text descriptions. These images will evoke memories for many gamers, as they were slowly sketched on screen and then painstakingly coloured in, line by line. But for fans of interactive fiction, behind the crude graphics lay an engrossing adventure. *The Hobbit* was ahead of its time, introducing an intelligent parser, non-playable characters and non-linear progression years before it became commonplace.

Tolkien, who famously wrote his tomes by hand, would have been baffled by this game, for sure. Yet the idea of readers being able to explore his world at will would have surely satisfied him.



ON SPEC
VERONIKA MEGLER

The Spectrum developer talks Tolkein



On the Spectrum

It was sleek, very obviously aimed at the home market. It was a good game-playing machine. We did all our development on the TRS-80 which was more focused on the business market.

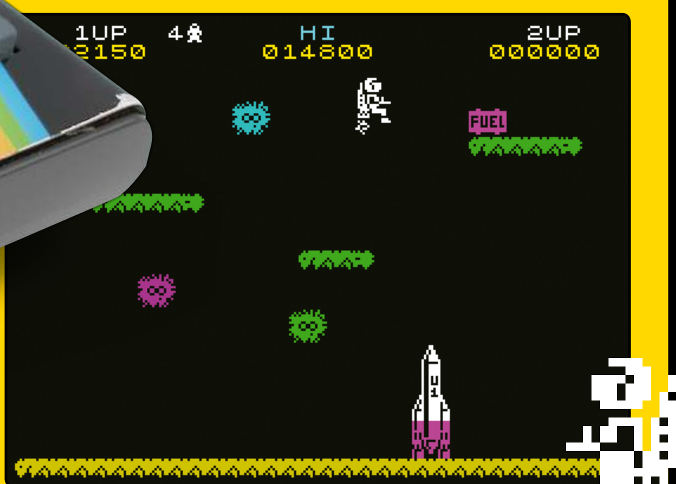
On developing *The Hobbit*

We knew we were taking the current state of the art a leap forwards. But we got so caught up in the building of the game we didn't think about that much. We talked more about design and the challenges of debugging something so complex. The 'Inglish' environment was more structured and testable, while the randomness of the NPCs and the game engine made testing that a real challenge.

On the impact of *The Hobbit*

I'm still astonished and humbled when I hear the impact *The Hobbit* had on peoples' lives, and on other gamers and developers who came after. Playing the game had far more impact on their lives than developing the game had on mine!





1983 JETPAC

DEVELOPER: ULTIMATE **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

'From famine to feast': that sums up 1983 basically. The Spectrum was suddenly everywhere, with Sinclair reportedly selling half a million machines by August 1983. The userbase exploded and so did the number of amazing games available. Sandy White's *Ant Attack* pioneered the isometric adventure while Matthew Smith's *Manic Miner* redefined the platform game. And then a brand-new outfit from the Midlands went and produced the purest arcade experience yet on the Spectrum.

Jetpac was the debut offering from Ultimate Play The Game, the software house that would dominate the Spectrum's early years. There were many single-screen shooters around at the time, but this was just so polished, so professional, that it could have come straight out of the arcades. The objective of warily refuelling your space rocket while blasting aliens was simple yet compulsive. Yes, colours clashed and sprites flickered but there's arguably never been a better example of a pick-up-and-play game for the Spectrum – and it still holds up today. *Jetpac* was just the beginning for Ultimate: *Pssst*, *Cookie*, *Tranz Am* and *Jetpac* sequel *Lunar Jetman* all arrived before the year was out.

1984 THE LORDS OF MIDNIGHT

DEVELOPER: MIKE SINGLETON **GENRE:** STRATEGY ADVENTURE

Ultimate carried on where it had left off, releasing several more Spectrum classics this year including *Atic Atac*, *Sabre Wulf* and the groundbreaking *Knight Lore*. Any one of those was a contender for 1984's best game, as were Graftgold's *Avalon* and Microsphere's *Skool Daze*, but there's one title that comes out on top for being both technically brilliant and brilliantly fun.

The Lords Of Midnight, developed by Mike Singleton and published by Beyond, was so advanced that it made *The Hobbit* look like a type-in listing. Featuring 4,000 locations (all depicted visually, thanks to Mike's inventive 'Landscaping' system), dozens of playable characters and multiple ways of seizing victory, this sprawling strategy adventure shouldn't really have been possible on the Spectrum with its limited hardware and meagre 48K memory. But Mike brought the land of Midnight to life and everyone who trekked, battled, cowered and bluffed their way across its icy wastes will know that *The Lords Of Midnight* was simply peerless on release. Even the follow-up, 1985's *Doomdark's Revenge*, struggled to top the seminal original.





1985 CHAOS

DEVELOPER: JULIAN GOLLOP **GENRE:** TURN-BASED COMBAT

With each passing year more and more amazing games were made available for the Spectrum. 1985 saw the release of many fan favourites including *Fairlight*, *Saboteur*, *Cyclone*, *Highway Encounter* and *Tau Ceti*. This was also the year that Acornsoft's all-conquering *Elite* finally docked onto the Spectrum and easily justified the hype surrounding it.

In comparison, *Chaos* was not a game that people were waiting for. Creator Julian Gollop was hardly known and publisher Games Workshop was better known as a developer of board games than computer games. The game's appearance certainly didn't help sell it in the press, thanks to the sparse black backgrounds and tiny, twitching sprites. But if there was ever a game where its design triumphed over graphics then *Chaos* was it. Up to eight warring wizards battled it out on the 'Plane Of Limbo', taking turns to unleash their spells and be the last sorcerer standing. The spells were randomly apportioned, so every game played out differently.

Julian had been developing the game for years, initially as a board game played between friends, so the computer version was impressively deep and perfectly balanced. And when eight human players were locked in battle, hurling gold dragons and gooey blobs around the place, it was, well, chaos.

The game might not have been a hit when first released but over the years it has attracted a devoted following. Many will have discovered it retrospectively thanks to *Your Sinclair* magazine, which included it on two separate cover tapes in 1990 and 1993. The magazine billed it as a "true classic" and it's impossible to argue with that.



ON SPEC JULIAN GOLLOP



The legendary designer talks about Chaos

On creating *Chaos* as a computer game

I was able to add an extraordinary game mechanic – the illusion system. The idea was that you could summon a creature as an illusion and they would behave as normal but they could be 'disbelieved' by any other player. I still saw *Chaos* as primarily a multiplayer game, but the AI proved to be pretty cool – something you can't really do for a board game. Many players loved to play a co-op game against the AI wizards before turning on each other.

On the Spectrum

The Speccy was absolutely essential for my career. For strategy games it was great because you had a whopping 48K available and it was cheaper than the alternatives. Not only was I able to persuade my parents to buy me one but I was able to make fairly sophisticated games for it. And the ZX microdrives never let me down!

1986 TURBO ESPRIT

DEVELOPER: DURELL SOFTWARE **GENRE:** DRIVING

In this year Sinclair launched the Spectrum 128, a new model that was supposed to usher in the next generation of Speccy games. That didn't happen, of course, as most publishers were happy to continue releasing standard 48K games with some token 128 improvements (Rainbird's *Starglider* and Mastertronic's *Knight Tyme* were two early exceptions). It didn't matter too much as the flow of amazing 48K games continued with gems like *The Great Escape*, *The Trap Door* and *Quazatron*.

Turbo Esprit from programmer Mike Richardson was another title that showcased what could be achieved on the bog-standard Speccy. It was essentially an 8-bit prototype of *Driver* from Reflections, presenting 'living' 3D cities which you could freely navigate. The objective was to catch drug runners but for most players there was joy in simply driving around, obeying traffic lights, zebra crossings, junctions and the general rules of the road – or more likely, flouting them. Even now, we feel desperately sorry for those little guys on their ladders, just going about their work.

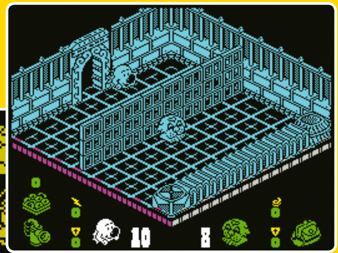


1987 HEAD OVER HEELS

DEVELOPER: OCEAN SOFTWARE **GENRE:** ISOMETRIC ADVENTURE

Isometric adventures were hugely popular on the Spectrum. Ultimate showed with *Knight Lore* and *Alien 8* that the Spectrum's processor had the grunt to make isometric presentation work well, and then pretty much everyone else followed its lead. Games like *Sweevo's World*, *Movie* and *Batman* not only optimised the technique but also added their own unique traits and quirks. This progression peaked with *Head Over Heels*.

Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond's follow-up to their *Batman* game may have lacked a popular licence but it was strong enough to succeed on reputation alone. Its key feature was to introduce two playable characters, with their own strengths and weaknesses, which you could flick between. And when reunited (which was the game's first task), you could join them up and take on the evil Blacktooth Empire together. *Head Over Heels* was cute, clever, devious and delightful. The graphics and animation were excellent and so was the sound (on the 128K version at least). All in all, this was an instant Spectrum classic and yet another hit for Ocean which was finding form after a few uneven years.







1988 R-TYPE

DEVELOPER: SOFTWARE STUDIOS **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

By this point the Spectrum market was becoming increasingly dominated by coin-op conversions. That was not necessarily a bad thing, as there had been genuinely excellent attempts (*Bomb Jack* from Elite, *Renegade* from Imagine, and *Bubble Bobble* from Firebird being just three). Yet the whole circus surrounding US Gold's hopelessly optimistic version of *Out Run* did leave a sour taste behind.

Hopes weren't particularly high for the Spectrum version of *R-Type*. How could anyone conceivably take the hottest shooter in the arcades, with its crazy array of weapons and screen-filling bosses, and squeeze it all onto the Speccy with any degree of accuracy? Programmer Bob Pape somehow managed it, delivering not only the number one coin-op conversion for the Spectrum but also one of the best games for the machine period. Some suspect witchcraft was involved in pushing the Spectrum to its absolute limits, but by reading the story behind *R-Type* in Bob's free PDF book *It's Behind You*, you'll discover that he was a meticulous coder who chewed through problem after problem and simply wouldn't settle for second best. An absolutely sublime conversion.

1989 MYTH

DEVELOPER: CONCEPT ANIMATIONS **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

This was the year of *Robocop*. Ocean's blockbuster film tie-in was released at the end of 1988 and dominated the sales charts throughout 1989. With such emphasis of licensed properties games, like *Myth*, were easy to overlook. But not here, not now.

Myth was basically a traditional arcade adventure dressed up to the nines. You played a young boy travelling through time, solving clever puzzles in order to defeat demons and dragons and other mythical beasts. Each stage was almost like a spectacle that kept unfolding, and the whole thing was enlivened by the most fantastic graphics and animation (the driving rain and lightning strikes on the Viking stage were like something from a 16-bit title). The controls were a bit iffy (pressing down to jump?), and the shoot-'em-up finale felt bolted on, but overall *Myth* was an experience that felt like it had been crafted with great care and attention. It was the kind of game you'd imagine Ultimate would be making had it not quit the Spectrum scene.





1990 RAINBOW ISLANDS

DEVELOPER: GRAFTGOLD
GENRE: PLATFORMER

Colour clash was the Spectrum problem that never went away and one of the most common ways of avoiding it was to opt for a two-colour display. This resulted in too many monochrome titles that didn't clash but looked plain drab. Clearly this wasn't an option for *Rainbow Islands*, as doing it in monochrome would have caused an outcry (and possibly contravened the UK's Trade Descriptions Act in some way). After all, this was a conversion of a coin-op that was almost incandescent.



The Spectrum version was handled by Graftgold which made the most of the Spectrum's vibrant palette, throwing reds, yellows, cyans and magentas all over the place. The criminally overlooked 'bright' variants were also splashed about. Obviously, the character sprites and the rainbows themselves couldn't be multi-coloured on the Spectrum, but otherwise this was a bright and beautiful game. It played really well, too, and featured all of the content from the coin-op (bar the three secret islands, as per most of the home conversions). The game also performed admirably, barely slowing down even when the screen was really busy, and was enhanced for 128K machines with AY tunes and effects being the main addition.

Rainbow Islands was published by Ocean which was enjoying another strong year, particularly with its coin-op conversions. In addition to *Rainbow Islands* it also published excellent versions of *Midnight Resistance* by Special FX and *Pang* by Arc Developments. Towards the end of the year Ocean announced that it would focus on 128K-only games going forward. Would this decision spell the end for the trusty 48K Spectrum?



ON SPEC STEVE TURNER

The developer looks over the rainbow



On developing *Rainbow Islands* at Graftgold

The rainbows were a particular problem as they were huge colourful sprites. The game did not suit the Spectrum, but programmer David O'Connor did a brilliant job. He was determined to get the gameplay elements correct so it played just like the original. He invented a way of packing the maps so he could squeeze the data into the Spectrum's memory. He also understood the key to playability was a high framerate.

On the Spectrum

The Spectrum was an essential element to the beginning of Graftgold. At the time there was no other machine that sold in the numbers required to give a userbase big enough to make games development viable. It was cheap and easy to develop for. It was all down to programming techniques, rather than finding tricks with chips. Everything had to be built from the ground up, giving a good standing for more complex machines.

1991 SPELLBOUND DIZZY

DEVELOPER: BIG RED SOFTWARE **GENRE:** ADVENTURE

Owners of 48K models needn't have worried about Ocean's decision to overlook them as most publishers continued to support the original machine. This was particularly true of the budget publishers who began to pick up the slack as the number of full-price releases noticeably declined. Codemasters was the king of budget publishers and *Dizzy* was its prince. This, the fifth in the main *Dizzy* series, was his biggest adventure yet with 105 screens in total (the original *Dizzy* had 52 screens in comparison). It was also one of the best in the series, featuring some strong puzzles and fun sequences including a mine cart ride. It was best played on a 128K machine as it included AY music and extra character animations, but the whole adventure run perfectly on the standard 48K iteration of the Speccy.

This year also saw a couple of high-profile 16-bit releases ported down to the Spectrum in *Lemmings* and *North & South*. Both were decent versions and showed that the Speccy was still a viable platform for the latest hits.

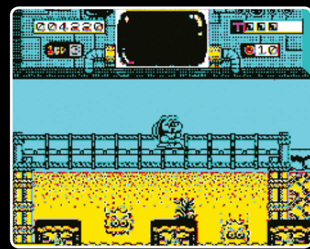


1992 TURBO THE TORTOISE

DEVELOPER: VISUAL IMPACT **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

Another year where budget titles outshone full-price releases. Ocean's *Space Gun* and *The Addams Family* were pretty solid, as was US Gold's *Indiana Jones And The Fate of Atlantis*, but the big publishers were clearly focusing on the 16-bit market now. Codemasters was still reliably cranking out budget games like *Captain Dynamo* and *Wild West Seymour*, yet it was this brilliant little platformer from Hi-Tec Software that stood out.

Turbo The Tortoise was obviously riffing heavily on *Sonic The Hedgehog*, although the game had more in common with *Super Mario Bros.* in terms of gameplay and presentation. As Turbo, you bounded through six horizontally-scrolling stages, disposing of baddies by jumping on their heads (or shooting them with a handy gun). Waiting at the end of each stage was a large boss which you had to defeat, and there were a number of bonus levels to find, too. *Turbo The Tortoise* was release twice – first by Hi-Tec, which went bust soon after, before being picking up and put out again by (guess who…) Codemasters.

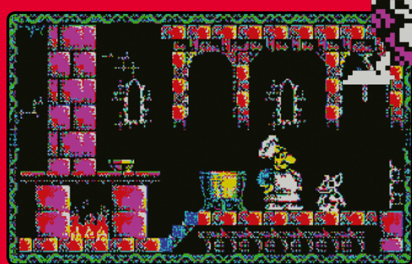


1993 DALEK ATTACK

DEVELOPER: 221B SOFTWARE
GENRE: PLATFORMER

In the UK releases reduced to a trickle this year. The titles were Nigel Mansell's *World Championship* from Gremlin and this, Alternative's long-awaited *Doctor Who* game (which was due out in 1992 but kept slipping). Bizarrely it was a run-and-gun platformer but it was fast and mostly fun. *Dalek Attack* was the last game to feature on the cover of *Your Sinclair* magazine which closed this year, along with *Sinclair User*.





1994 TOWDIE

DEVELOPER: THE BALARA BROTHERS
GENRE: ADVENTURE

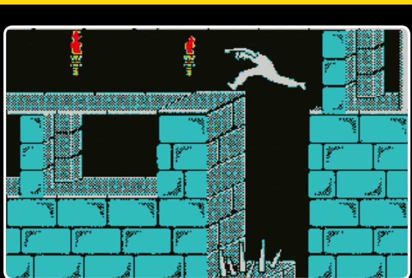
While the Spectrum was effectively finished in the United Kingdom, this was not the case elsewhere. Ultrasoft, from the former Czechoslovakia, continued to release commercial titles in Central Europe, including the puzzle game *Quadrex* and the arcade adventure *Towdie*. Although heavily indebted to the *Dizzy* series (of where there were many unofficial mods), *Towdie* was a great-looking game in which you played a tiny troll on a mission to slay a dragon.

1995 TWILIGHT

DEVELOPER: ULTRASOFT
GENRE: POINT-AND-CLICK ADVENTURE

Subtitled *Land Of Shadows*, this was another impressive release from Ultrasoft that successfully implemented a point-and-click adventure on the Spectrum. You play an astronaut returning to a barren Earth in the distant future. It doesn't feature too many locations and can be finished quickly, but it was an admirable achievement. A version of the game with the text translated into English was later released.





1996 PRINCE OF PERSIA

DEVELOPER: ENTROPY
GENRE: PLATFORMER

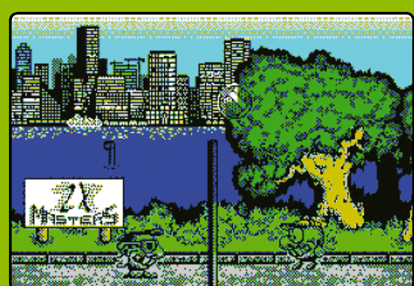
This story behind the belated release probably needs its own article. Having converted Jordan Mechner's hit game to the SAM Coupe, the programmers shopped around a Spectrum port in 1993 but there were no takers due to the shrinking market. Three years later this version was somehow acquired and sold commercially in Russia! It really is a great version of a classic game, and such a shame it wasn't put out properly in 1993.

1997 BLACK RAVEN

DEVELOPER: COPPER FEET
GENRE: REAL-TIME STRATEGY

The Spectrum remained hugely popular in Eastern Europe and there was strong demand for new software. This RTS game from Russian developer Copper Feet was definitely not *Stonkers*, being based instead on *Warcraft*. Despite the monochrome graphics, it played really well and was popular enough to spawn a mission disk and an isometric sequel (which sadly never progressed beyond a demo).





1998 HEADBALL

DEVELOPER: ZX MASTERS
GENRE: SPORTS

This was a fairly lean year in Spectrum land with just a steady flow of Russian games to keep things ticking over. The highlight of the year's output was this entertaining sports game from ZX Masters. Featuring nice chunky sprites and colourful animated backdrops, two players headed a ball (and later a bomb!) back and forth over a net, trying to keep it in the air for as long as possible. Not sophisticated, but a lot of fun – with some nice AY tunes.

1999 TITANIC

DEVELOPER: FATALITY
GENRE: PUZZLE

Or *Pussy: Love Story From Titanic* to give the game its full, inexplicable title. This Russian oddity was themed around James Cameron's movie, yet the two players were based on Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet rather than their characters! The game was based on the little-known Japanese puzzle game *Magical Puzzle Popils* which was released for the Game Gear in 1991. Wait… are those *Dragonball Z* sprites we see!?



2000 EXISTENZ

DEVELOPER: TRIUMPH GAME LABS
GENRE: SHOOT-'EM-UP

It would be remiss of us not to highlight some mods. *Existenz* was an unofficial update of *Delfox*, the 1988 horizontal shooter from Spanish developer Dinamic Software. In fact, the game is also known as *Crazy Delfox* and that gives you an idea of what's going on here. The Russian dev team took the original game and ramped up the action to manic proportions and then underlined everything with a thumping AY soundtrack.



2001 ONE MAN & HIS DROID II

DEVELOPER: CLIVE BROOKER
GENRE: MAZE GAME

According to World of Spectrum, there were fewer games released this year than any other. Still, a total of 43 titles arrived in 2001, including this previously unreleased sequel. Clive Brooker wrote his follow-up in 1991, but Mastertronic wasn't interested in publishing it, so he shared it on the web. And we should thank Clive, as it's a sequel that deserves to be played.



2002 ZX HEROES

DEVELOPER: IGOR MAKOVSKY **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

There have been dozens of *Jet Set Willy* mods over the years, with the number increasing following the initial release of John Elliott's popular JSWED tool in 1996. Where as previously the mods simply added new screens for the intrepid Miner Willy to explore, the new editor introduced changes to the way many game elements worked, leading to more sophisticated room layouts for players to negotiate.

This 40-room mod from Igor Makovsky is one of the very best and needs to be experienced. It's basically a respectful tribute to some of the greatest games from the Spectrum archive including *Pyjamarama*, *Technician Ted* and *Dynamite Dan*. Some classic arcade conversions get a look in too, namely *Bubble Bobble* and *Arkanoid*. Imagine a bunch of classic game characters crashing a party in Willy's mansion and you get the idea. Another impressive Speccy release this year was *Abe's Mission: Escape*, a version of the first two *Oddworld* games which was the winning entry in the Your Game 2002 competition.



ON SPEC
IGOR MAKOVSKY



The Spectrum superhero stops by for a chat

On growing up with the Spectrum

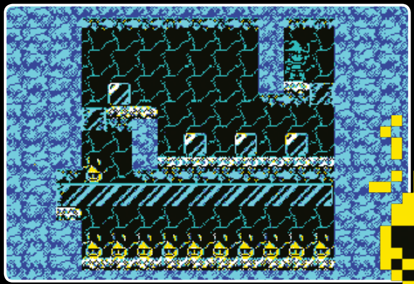
A Soviet Spectrum clone (Kvant BK) was my father's present to me when I was six years old. Loading tapes, playing games, trying my first attempts at coding are deeply connected with sweet times spent together with my dad.

On the popularity of *Jet Set Willy* clones

It's easy to create a whole world with custom animations and an interesting, non-linear story with the right editor, like the amazing JSWED.

On creating *ZX Heroes*

Jet Set Willy games have a unique rhythm. It's not too fast and not too dynamic – cosy and enjoyable to play with a cup of tea! I'm fond of making tributes and many games inspired me when creating *ZX Heroes*. The *Doom 3* beta was released that year and I wanted to show that we can keep Spectrum games in our hearts.



2003 FIRE 'N ICE

DEVELOPER: N-DISCOVERY
GENRE: ARCADE PUZZLE

Tecmo's arcade puzzle *Solomon's Key* was ported to many home systems including the Spectrum in 1987. *Fire 'n Ice* was the follow-up in which players had to extinguish the flames using blocks of ice. It was released for the NES in 1992 – until Russian group n-Discovery created this unofficial port for the 128K Spectrum.

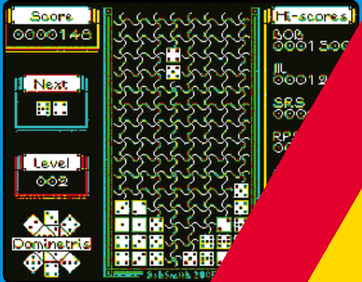
This is perhaps the first title to open peoples' eyes to the Spectrum homebrew scene. Graphics and sound are top-notch and the design is perfect. All in all it's a gorgeous game that everyone should try out.



2004 FUN PARK

DEVELOPER: JONATHAN CAULDWELL
GENRE: SIMULATION

Jonathan Cauldwell is known to many fans as a prolific creator of homebrew, releasing dozens of games over the past 15 or so years. *Fun Park* is one of his most ambitious titles, being a demake of Bullfrog's *Theme Park* that runs on a 16K Spectrum. The original version, a minigame competition titled *Amusement Park 4000*, was even more remarkable, running in just 4K! But *Fun Park* is much more than an example of what can be achieved in limited memory.



2005 DOMINETRIS

DEVELOPER: BOB SMITH **GENRE:** ARCADE PUZZLE

In Bob Smith's *Dominetris* you have to arrange falling dominoes so that the digits match, and then align the corresponding number of blocks to make them disappear from play (i.e., you need to place five fives together, and six sixes). It's simple stuff but quickly gets fraught as the screen starts to get cluttered. As Spectrum *Tetris* clones go this is easily one of the best. Bob would go on to create a name for himself in homebrew circles, and in 2010 he'd create an expanded version of *Dominetris* – for the ZX81, no less!

ON SPEC

JONATHAN CAULDWELL

The developer on his love for the Speccy Scene

On his favourite creation
Most of them have something going for them. The title which I'm most proud of is *Encyclopaedia Galactica Remixed*, which sees the player flying around different star systems and collecting samples of alien life to document for the eponymous tome.

On the Spectrum scene
Dozens of new games are created every year with new authors appearing to write the game they wanted to as a child. It's great to see so many people interested in learning Z80 assembler or using Churrera or Arcade Game Designer in different ways to create new titles. The quality is high and some of the games developed over recent years would have received rave reviews in the Eighties. Interest in developing new games just keeps growing and I have no plans to stop any time soon.

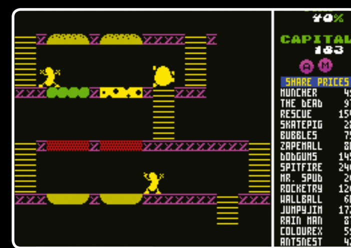


2006 GAMEX

DEVELOPER: JONATHAN CAULDWELL **GENRE:** MINIGAME COLLECTION

Another one from Jonathan Cauldwell and this was probably his most intriguing and ambitious game to date. We say 'game' when this is actually a collection of 16 minigames based on classic arcade concepts (although to refer to them as mere clones is doing them a disservice, as there are some brilliant little challenges included).

Rather than just be a collection of titles, the games are all connected by the unique 'Games Exchange' element where you buy and sell shares in the games on offer. So you begin by building up some of your capital by playing a *Pac-Man* variant and then invest this in other titles of varying difficulty, using your own game-playing skills to amass more and more resources. You'll need to watch out for tax (too many penalties and it's game over), but more importantly you need to keep your eye on the time as it's easy to lose track of it when you are wheelin' and dealin' on *GameX*. The stock market shenanigans returned for a sequel, subtitled *Playing Dividends*, which was released in 2015



2007 CANNON BUBBLE

DEVELOPER: COMPUTER EMUZONE
GENRE: PUZZLE

Spanish team Computer Emuzone produced some strong demakes this year, including the *Bejeweled* clone *Betiled*. But in terms of retro appeal you can't beat *Cannon Bubble*. Featuring pirate-themed graphics and a jaunty soundtrack, this is a game that does everything right. It even includes a two-player mode so you can go head-to-head against a friend.



2008 SPLATTR

DEVELOPER: BOB SMITH
GENRE: SHOOT-'EM-UP

Massive graphics and no colour clash? That doesn't sound like the Speccy. Yet if the sprites are built using character squares then the attributes can't clash. Based on this observation (which is reflected in the title – *ATTR* is the attribute command in Sinclair Basic), Bob Smith created this unique shooter where you blast huge sprites that fill the screen. This is one of those games where static screenshots simply don't do it justice.



2009 KING'S VALLEY

DEVELOPER: RETROWORKS
GENRE: PLATFORMER

The MSX library is littered with Speccy ports, so it's nice to see it work in reverse sometimes. This conversion of Konami's platformer from Spain's RetroWorks is a joy to play. Think *Lode Runner*, only here you're raiding pyramids for treasure. As you'd expect from RetroWorks the presentation is spot-on, featuring impressive graphics and AY tunes.





2010 HORACE IN THE MYSTIC WOODS

DEVELOPER: BOB SMITH
GENRE: PLATFORMER

Horace was a mascot for the Speccy, appearing in three beloved titles. A fourth game was canned in 1985 but that wasn't the end. In 1995 Psion hired Michael Ware to write *Horace In The Mystic Woods* for the Psion 3 PDA and 15 years later Bob Smith ported the game to the Spectrum.

Horace's return was the highlight release of this year. The original version was monochrome, but on the Spectrum all 64 screens of platforming action are daubed with lovely colour. The controls are excellent, as is the sound. It's good to have you back, Horace.



2011 CRAY 5

DEVELOPER: RETROWORKS **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

This was the strongest year yet for homebrew releases, with a glut of great games arriving. *Cray 5* takes the crown for being charming, challenging and just brilliant.

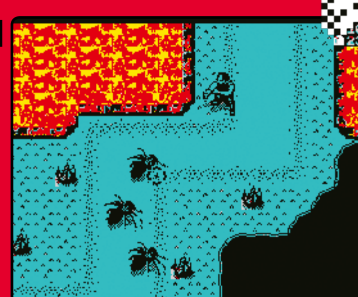
The game was originally developed by Topo Soft in 1987 and released for the Amstrad CPC. Topo Soft did release a number of games for the Spectrum but *Cray 5* was not one of them. Thanks to RetroWorks, this oversight has been corrected – with some style. It looks amazing, resembling a Raffaele Cecco game, and the AY soundtrack is fantastic. Overall it's a clear cut above the CPC original.

2012 SURVIVISECTION

DEVELOPER: SANCHEZ **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

Another year where it's hard to select the best game. *Survivisection* from Sanchez (Aleksander Udotov) has to be singled out, though, for taking the theme of *Commando* and taking it further than anyone thought possible on the Spectrum.

Rather than control your soldier directly you use a pointer to select where he moves and fires. And it's not about shooting everything, as there's a degree of strategy and puzzling, too. Plus it looks great, featuring full colour and full-screen scrolling.





2013 BRUNILDA

DEVELOPER: RETROWORKS
GENRE: GRAPHIC ADVENTURE

In this *Zelda*-style adventure you play a monk on a pilgrimage who seeks shelter for the night in a village – and it turns into a long night indeed as a mystery unfolds and you're called on to converse with the locals and explore the surrounding forests and caves.

This is a pure graphic adventure with no battles, and the emphasis is on story, and the adventure system, with its colourful environments and eight-way scrolling, is exceptional. It's long and involving but it's split into several chapters.





2015 CASTLEVANIA: SPECTRAL INTERLUDE

DEVELOPER: REWIND
GENRE: ADVENTURE

You could say that the games in this list have been leading to this moment, when in 2015 Aleksander Udotov unveiled his version of *Castlevania* for the Spectrum 128K. It was a significant moment, as word of this title spread far beyond the usual circles. For a while it seemed that everyone was talking about *Spectral Interlude*: the detailed graphics, the incredible 12-song soundtrack, and the fact that this was *Castlevania*, in all its whip-cracking, vampire-slaying glory, on the Spectrum.

The game actually started out as a Spectrum version of the NES game *Castlevania II: Simon's Quest* but soon emerged as an original, 150-screen adventure that stands proudly on its own.

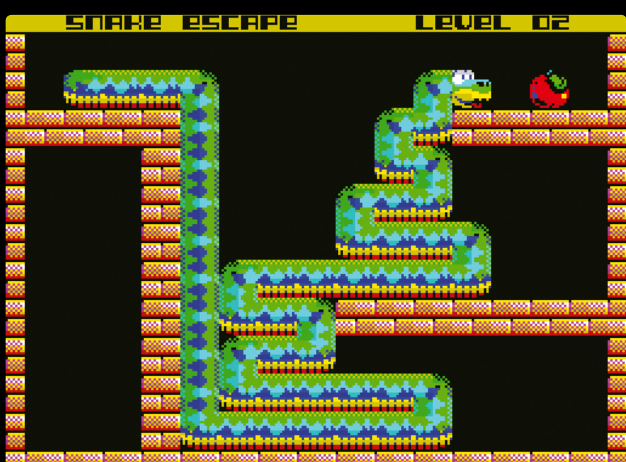
2014 METAL MAN RELOADED

DEVELOPER: OLEG ORIGIN **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP

There was a time when *Robocop* was held up as one of the most impressive games on the Spectrum. Fast forward 25 years and we have *Metal Man*, who stomps all over poor Murphy. The design is similar to Ocean's hit but the graphics are, well, just look at them. There's no monochrome drabness here, oh no. Like many of Ocean's titles, it's a mix of styles, with on-foot shooting with puzzle sections and a nifty motorbike sequence.

If you're wondering about the title, the original *Metal Man* was originally released by Oleg Origin in 1997 on a Russian compilation disk.





2016 SNAKE ESCAPE

DEVELOPER: EINAR SAUKAS **GENRE:** PUZZLE

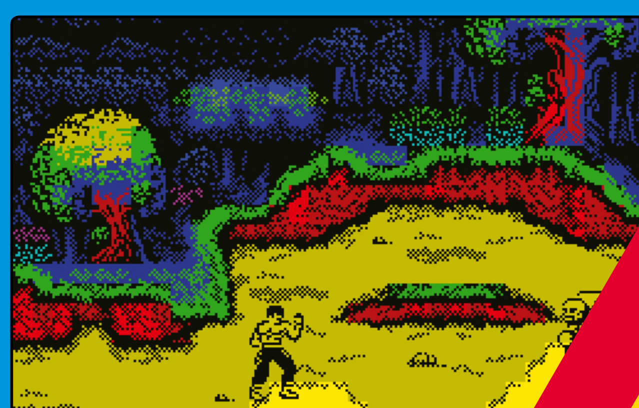
Perhaps fuelled by the success of *Spectral Interlude*, 2016 turned out to be a golden year for releases. Highlights include the adventure game *Sam Mallard*, the *Boulder Dash* update *Tourmaline*, and unique driving/action/puzzle thing *Car Wars*. And not forgetting *The Dark*, the *Doom* clone from Oleg Origin (which was another update of one of his experiments).

Our top choice is *Snake Escape*, Einar Saukas' version of the popular online game *Lime Rick* in which you guide a snake to the apple using its own coiling body as a platform. You'll notice that the graphics (by Jarrod Bentley) are a lot more colourful than usual and that's because the game uses Einar's own *Nirvana Engine*, a software solution to the Speccy's limited colour resolution which lets you have up to eight colours per character square. It's a truly impressive effect and it works on any standard Spectrum. Several other *Nirvana* games, including *Dreamwalker*, *Multidude* and *Stormfinch*, have been released previously and *Snake Escape* continues this trend for hyper-colourful Spectrum games.

2017 AND BEYOND...

This year is already looking like a promising one for new releases. Some nice arcade platformers have already been released in the first half of the year including *The Ship Of Doom* from Mat Recardo, *Foggy's Quest* from John Blythe, and *Ooze* from Andy Johns. Looking ahead, both Jonathan Cauldwell (*Egghead 6*) and Bob Smith (*SokoBAArn*) are busy with new developments. The one we're most looking forward to is *No Fate* (pictured), an arcade-style brawler from the same team behind *Castlevania: Spectral Interlude*.

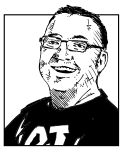
The release of the Spectrum Next device at the end of year will signal the arrival of more fresh games, including some 256-colour ones like *Baggers On Ladders* from Jim Bagley and *Nodes of Yesod Next* from Steve Wetherill. There's also *Wonderful Dizzy* from the Oliver twins and friends, which was initiated when a stretch goal for the Next Kickstarter campaign was met. Which of these games will be the best of 2017, and what can we expect in future years following the debut of the Next? We can't wait to find out.



» RETROREVIVAL

Rod-Land

IN ROD WE TRUST



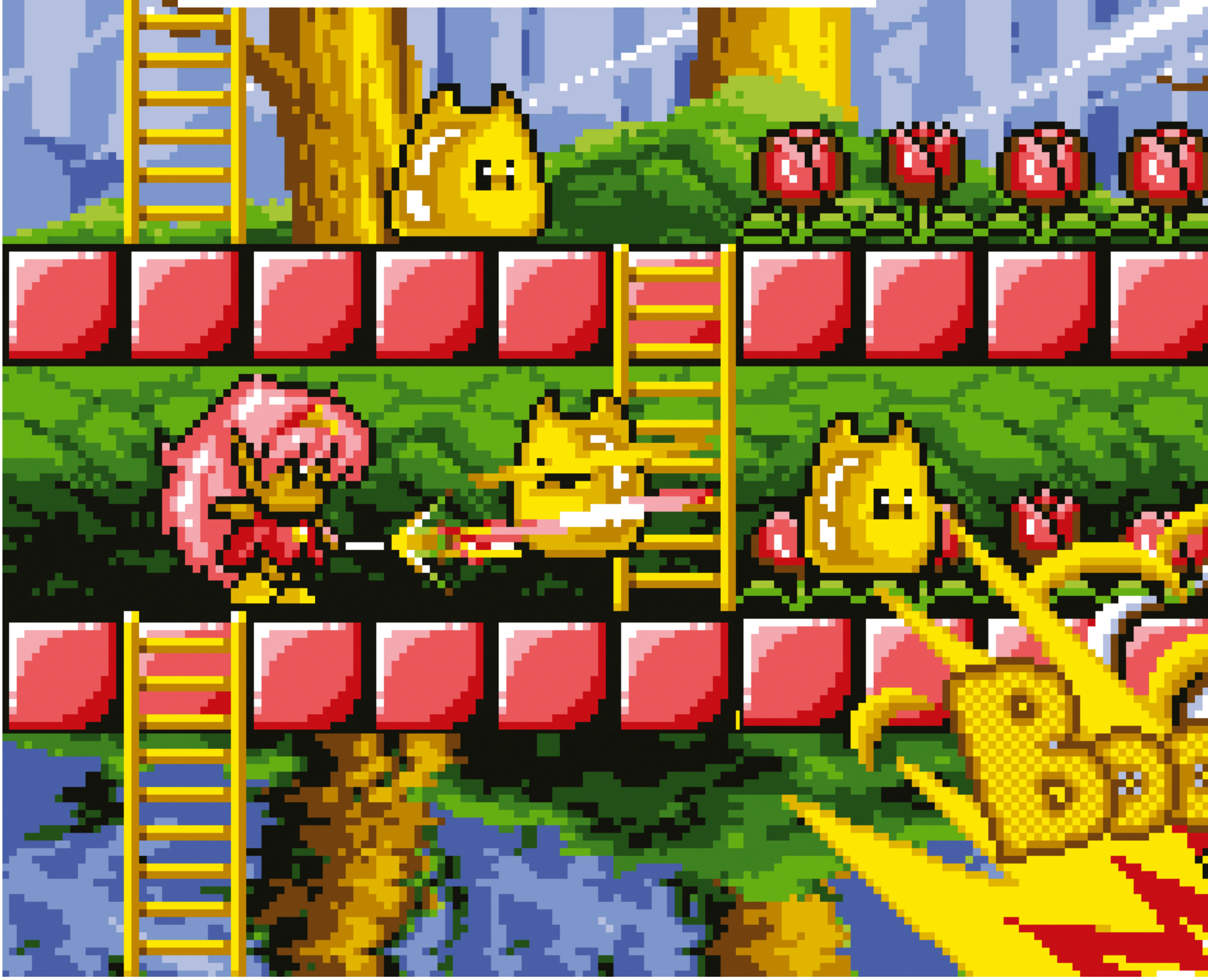
» AMIGA » 1991 » THE SALES CURVE

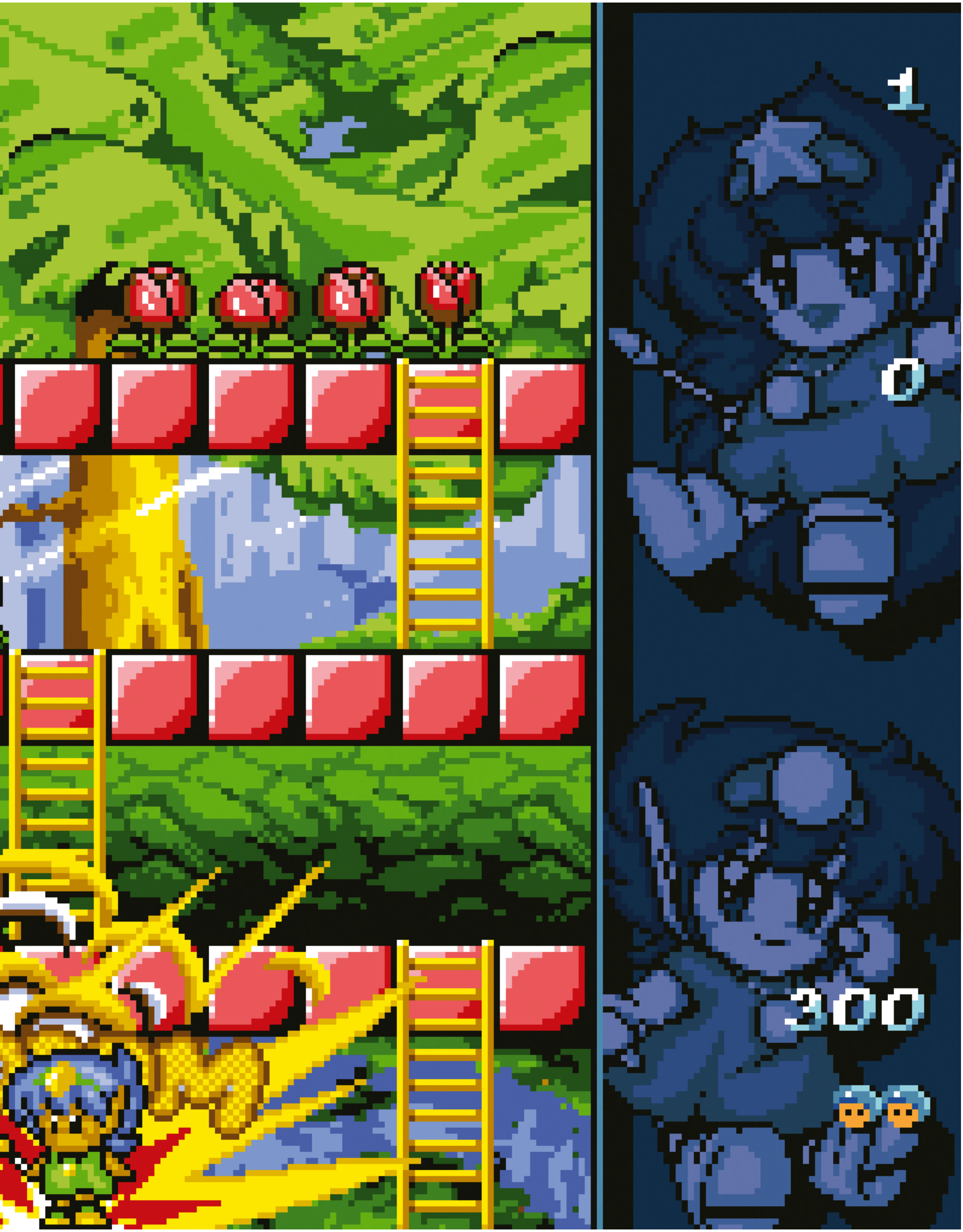
It's a well-known fact that if you're friends with someone who owns a different gaming system to your own, you mercilessly rib them for it until they end up a broken mess. Some see it as mean-spirited, but it's simply a friendly rivalry that allows you to constantly remind someone that they've backed the wrong horse. Sometimes, though, it backfires, and one of those times involved this cracking conversion by The Sales Curve.

As a Mega Drive owner, I was always able to lord it over my Amiga-owning friend, Marcus, because he had an Amiga and therefore had rubbish versions of most of the arcade games we both used to enjoy playing. We also enjoyed shooters, and, again, the Mega Drive always won out, allowing me a smugness that I'm sure my long-standing friend got tired of. Granted, there were lots of great games on the Amiga (I'd later own a 1200), but we were rivals and it was all about that one-upmanship that is as prevalent in teenagers as thinking they know everything.

Marcus had a trump card, though. Marcus had *Rod-Land* on the Amiga, and he loaded it up with a strange smile on his face. A smile I'd rarely seen, and it was because I later realised it was a smile of satisfaction. The cutscenes, the graphics, the bosses, everything seemed perfect to me and while I now know it's not as arcade perfect as I remember, it certainly seemed that way to 17-year-old me. "Have you got this on your Mega Drive yet, Darran? It's really good," began Marcus, knowing full well that it wasn't coming out on Sega's console. "I think it's out in Japan," he pressed. "Maybe you can pop into the Video Game Centre and order it from there."

A trip later that week to Winton proved that I had been well and truly stitched up by my good friend. I had the last laugh though – *Rod-Land* didn't exist but I was able to pick up a copy of *Streets Of Rage*. Game set and match, Darran. *

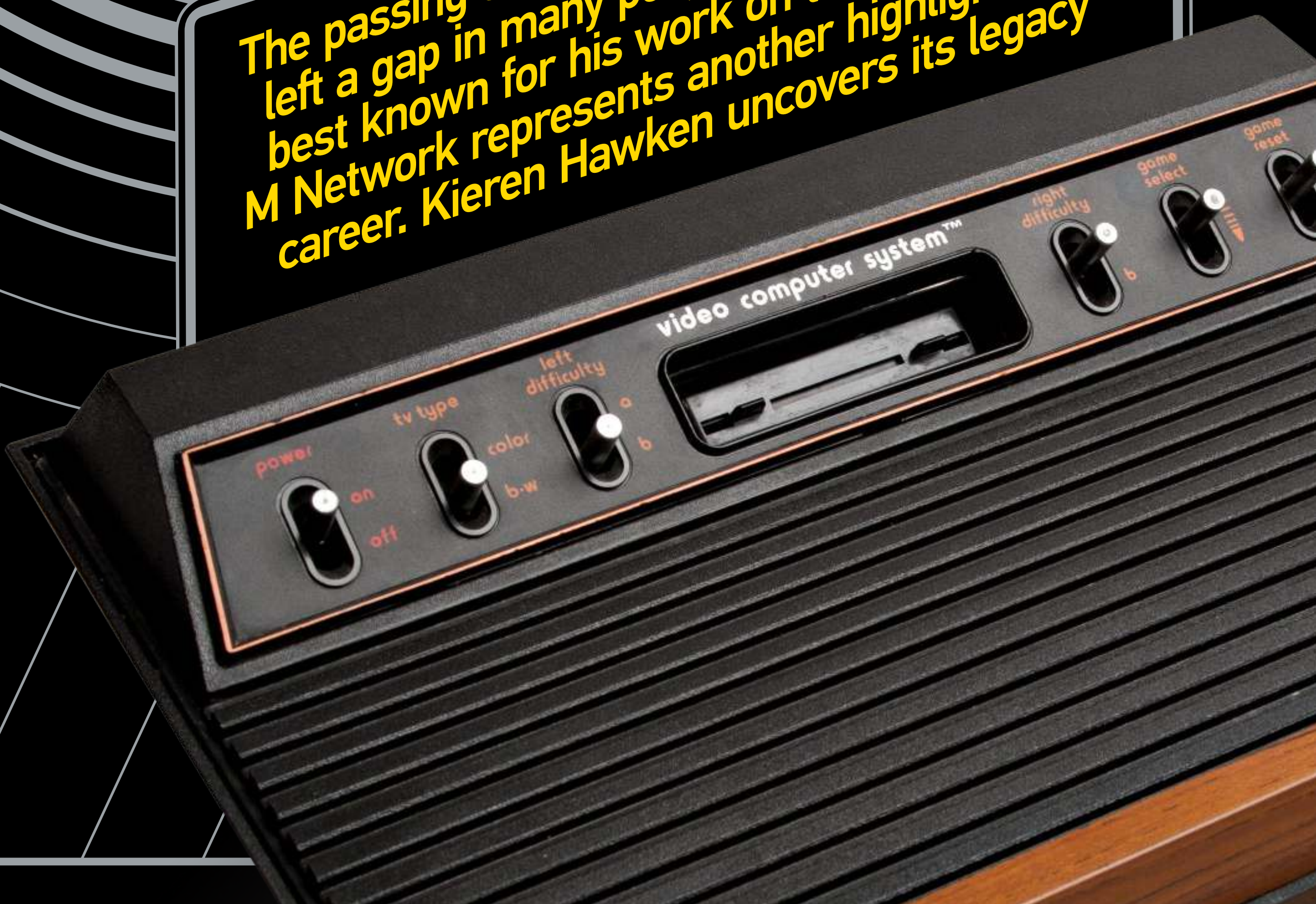



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From the Archives

M NETWORK

The passing of Keith Robinson earlier this year left a gap in many peoples' hearts. Although best known for his work on the Intellivision, M Network represents another highlight of his career. Kieren Hawken uncovers its legacy



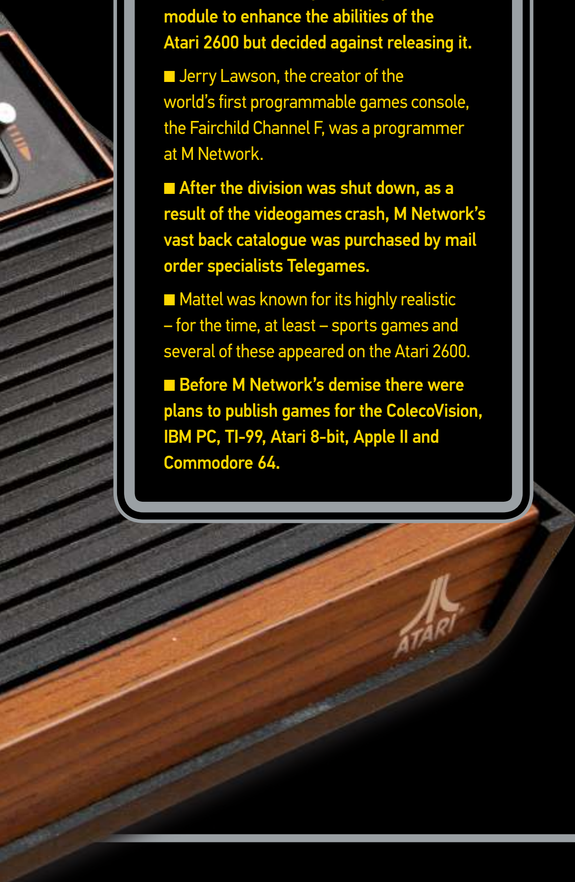




» [Atari 2600] *Air Raiders* is an impressive cockpit-viewed shoot-'em-up that was later rereleased as *Bogey Blaster* by Telegames.

INSTANT EXPERT

- M Network was a division of Mattel Electronics set up to publish games for rival machines.
- **Many of M Network's Atari 2600 games featured different names to their Intellivision counterparts.**
- The label was formed out of Mattel external contractor APh wanting more royalties from its games.
- **M Network licensed several popular arcade games from Data East, including the likes of *Bump 'N' Jump*, *BurgerTime* and *Lock 'N' Chase*.**
- Other properties licensed by M Network included cult Disney film *Tron*, *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, *Rocky And Bullwinkle* and *Masters Of The Universe*.
- **M Network developed an expansion module to enhance the abilities of the Atari 2600 but decided against releasing it.**
- Jerry Lawson, the creator of the world's first programmable games console, the Fairchild Channel F, was a programmer at M Network.
- **After the division was shut down, as a result of the videogames crash, M Network's vast back catalogue was purchased by mail order specialists Telegames.**
- Mattel was known for its highly realistic – for the time, at least – sports games and several of these appeared on the Atari 2600.
- **Before M Network's demise there were plans to publish games for the ColecoVision, IBM PC, TI-99, Atari 8-bit, Apple II and Commodore 64.**



The story starts in 1977, with the release of the Atari 2600, which would go onto become a massive success. The Design And Development division of Mattel Toys looked on with interest and saw enough room in the market for a competitor. So the head of this department, Richard Chang, sought out some help from people who were already involved in the microprocessor and computer programming industry. Richard soon came across a company by the name of APh Technology Consulting, and after some fruitful discussions with its owner Glenn Hightower, they came to an agreement to develop what would become the Mattel Intellivision. However, it wasn't long before this partnership started to sour, as APh started to become aware of just how big the videogame market had become. As 1980 rolled around, it was reported that Mattel was raking in around $1.5m revenue per game. With APh being paid just $30,000 per game, Glenn was understandably annoyed. So he gathered round his senior staff and decided that they should develop games for Mattel's biggest rival, Atari, instead and then offer them to the highest bidder. The problem was that APh was locked into an exclusivity agreement with Mattel that would be hard to get out of.

Glenn came up with a clever way to get round the agreement with Mattel that would hopefully avoid the ire of its lawyers. He immediately made all his programmers redundant. He wasn't getting rid of them completely, though, he actually hired them all back immediately on consultancy contracts, giving them the top-secret task of reverse engineering the Atari 2600's technology. It wasn't long before Glenn's team of coders had come up with some impressive new games and demos for the 2600, but he then had to decide what to do with them. After having a change of heart, he decided that he had nothing to lose by offering these games back to Mattel. If Mattel wanted them, then his company was in the money, if it didn't, then he may be able to negotiate a termination of the contract. He then went to Mattel and told it that a team of outside contractors had approached him and offered APh some new games for Atari's console. This wasn't an outright lie, of course, but he was bending the truth more than many would see as reasonable. Mattel Electronics fell for the story and showed an interest in the games, promising to discuss it with the higher ups in the company. Since Glenn would be paying this 'outside group' via his company, he hired a close friend to head it up. Any deal would then allow him to not only demand money up front, but also royalties based on every copy sold, which would work out to be far more lucrative than the Intellivision deal ever was.

The decision by Mattel to produce 2600 cartridges was controversial within the company. One faction argued that it could be used to help sell its competing game console by making the games inferior. While the other side reasoned that it would give consumers less reason to choose the Intellivision over the 2600. At a group meeting, Mattel formally announced Project Irata (Atari spelled backwards) and a senior Intellivision programmer



» [Atari 2600] *International Soccer* was a huge improvement on Atari's *Pele Soccer*.



TIMELINE

1977 ■ Mattel takes a great interest in the videogame industry after the launch of the Atari 2600.

1980 ■ **External contractor APh Consulting soon realises that it had got a bad deal from Mattel on payments for Intellivision games and considers creating Atari 2600 games on the quiet.**

1981 ■ APh forms an external group to develop games for the Atari 2600 so it can shop them to potential publishers.

1982 ■ **An agreement is reached between Mattel and APh to publish the Atari games on a new label called M Network.**

1983 ■ After the success of games based on *Tron*, M Network shows off highly advanced new games carrying the *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* licence to the public.

1984 ■ **The North American videogame crash hits Mattel hard and it decides to close down the entire videogame division cancelling all existing projects.**

1985 ■ Mattel sells all assets of the M Network label to popular mail order specialists Telegames which republishes the games.

1997 ■ **Keith Robinson forms Intellivision Productions and buys the rights to much of the former Mattel Electronics and M Network IP.**

1999 ■ Intellivision Productions shows off several unreleased M Network prototypes at the Classic Gaming Expo in America.

2000 ■ **Plans to release a number of unreleased M Network games through Intellivision Productions is announced. *Sword Fight* is the first of these.**



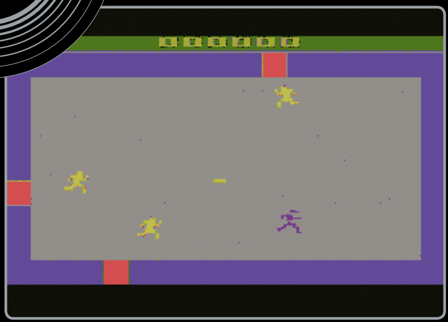
quipped back, "That's errata all right!" But when it came down to the final decision on whether to progress with this venture, the numbers didn't lie. At that time there were 10 million Atari consoles in peoples' homes, compared to just two million of Mattel's machine. It made more financial sense to develop games for the 12 million. And with that savvy decision the M Network label was born, with the M obviously standing for Mattel. The only thing to decide now was who was going to run the new venture, Mattel needed to act quickly as several games were ready to go so it turned to the head of the Blue Sky Rangers, Mattel's own team of Intellivision programmers, Keith Robinson. Before he passed away we were lucky enough to speak with Keith about his role at M Network and how he felt about producing games for other systems. "It was really great," he said. "It's always a challenge to learn a new system but also an exciting one. I always made sure that I would still control at least some of the Intellivision development, since I knew that Intellivision would always be the focal point of Mattel Electronics output." The original games that APh produced for M Network sold well, averaging around 200,000 cartridges each. They featured a brand-new cartridge design, based on Mattel's own Intellivision shells and packaging that made the brand very much the focal point. Before long, Mattel Electronics had to start hiring programmers to produce these new Atari games in-house.



» [Atari 2600] *Bump 'N' Jump* is an excellent conversion of the incredibly fun Data East arcade game of the same name.

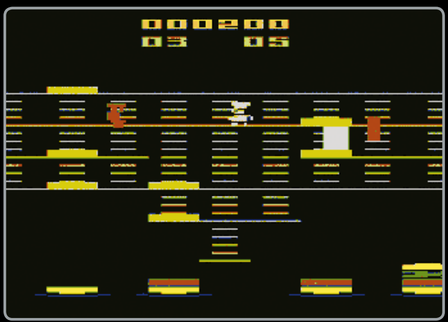
Programmer Dave Akers was one of the first men in at M Network and was responsible for some of its best games in *Star Strike, Bump 'N' Jump* and *BurgerTime*. It was his very first job in the industry before going on to even greater success with Atari's coin-op division and titles such as *Klax* and *Escape From the Planet Of The Robot Monsters*. Dave remembers his route to Mattel well. "I studied Electrical Engineering in college, but took a lot of programming courses," he says. "After graduation, I got a job in aerospace, but I enjoyed playing videogames in my spare time. I remember reading the first issue of *Electronics Games* magazine and realising that some people were making a living at developing games and I thought why couldn't I do that? I was living in the Los Angeles area at the time, and thought I would have to move to Silicon Valley to work at a game company, but then Mattel Electronics started advertising for game programmers for their Intellivision console. Mattel's headquarters was about a mile from where I was currently working. So I applied for a job there and was accepted. As it turns out, they were also looking for Atari programmers too, and this was the division that I ended up being assigned to." Another one of the first people through the door at M Network was coder Hal Finney, who would go on to help pioneer Bit Coin. Unfortunately Hal passed

DEFINING GAMES



TRON: DEADLY DISCS

■ While M Network released several games based on the cult Disney film *Tron*, by far the best one was *Deadly Discs*. The idea of the game is to use your frisbee-style weapon to take out the enemies before they get you, and make it to the next level. As the game goes on the enemies get harder, smarter and faster making the challenge that much greater. Their level of prowess is cleverly gauged by their colour – starting at blue and going up to orange. There are few Atari 2600 games out there that are more fast and frantic than *Deadly Discs*.



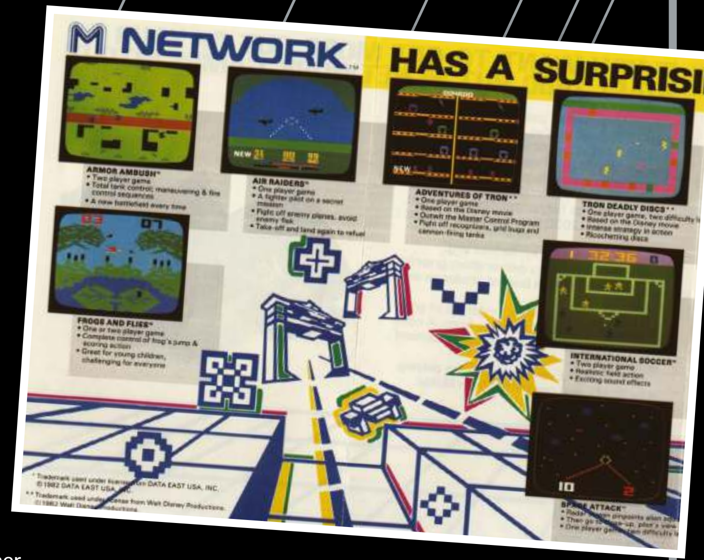
BURGERTIME

■ Of the many arcade conversions released by M Network, *BurgerTime* is perhaps the most popular. Originally released in the arcades by Data East, this game sees you take on the role of Chef Peter Pepper who is trying to complete an order of tasty burgers. He makes this food in a rather strange way, though – by walking on the ingredients! He must trample over all of the ingredients until they drop down onto the plates to form a complete burger. Trying to stop you on your mission are three deadly antagonists: Mr Egg, Mr Pickle and Mr Hot Dog.

ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

The purchase of the videogame rights to the hugely popular *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* was one of Mattel's most prestigious, astute and expensive acquisitions. So with that in mind, it's almost mind-blowing to learn that neither of M Network's planned *AD&D* games were ever released! The two titles in question, *Treasures Of Tarmin* and *Tower Of Mystery* were among the most advanced games developed for the console and were shown off in the press and at several shows only to be canned just before release. Taking the form of first-person RPG-type games, they used huge (for the time, anyway) 16K cartridges with an extra 2K of RAM for assistance. There were plans to finally release these in recent years through Keith Robinson's company The Intellivision Corporation, but obtaining the relevant rights for a fair price has put paid to these efforts thus far.

> "It's always a challenge to learn a new system but also an exciting one"
> Keith Robinson

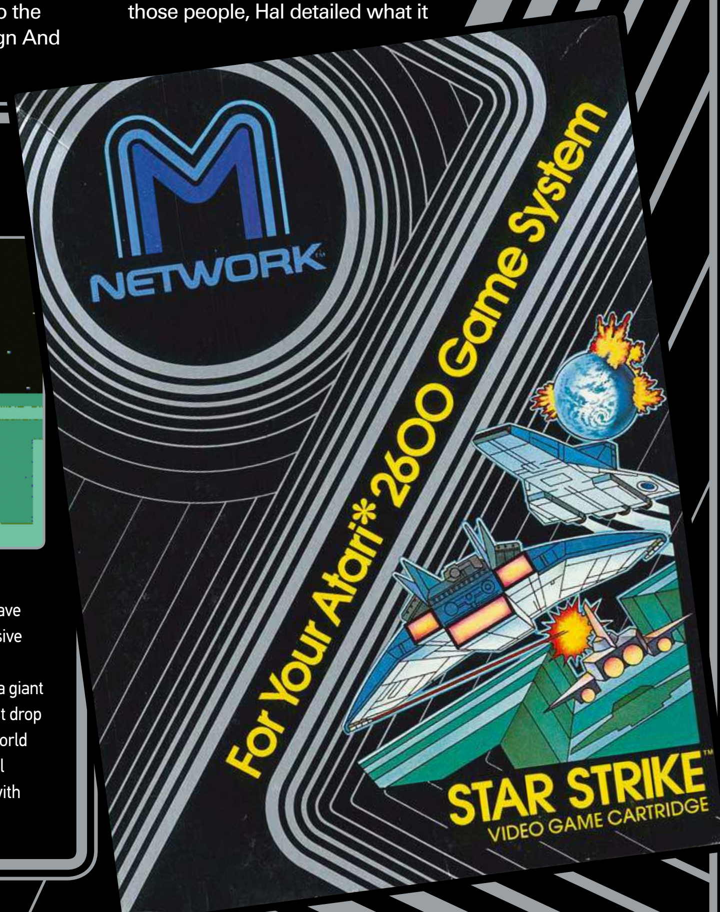


away in 2014. In an interview with Digital Press several years ago he detailed how he ended up at Mattel: "I was supposed to graduate from the California Institute of Technology in 1978 but I was short a few units. So I got hired full time at APh the summer of 1978 and just took the remaining classes at Caltech during that first year at APh, eventually graduating in 1979. I was hired by Glenn Hightower, who was co-owner and the main manager at that time, but I knew Dave Rolfe very well, who was already working there, and he put in a good word for me. For my first year or so I was working on cash register software but then moved into games when Mattel set up their new M Network label and needed Atari 2600 programmers."

Ironically, after worries that the Atari versions might reflect badly on its Intellivision counterparts, several key voices in the media felt the Atari 2600 games played better. Mattel had changed some of the names of the games to help combat this – thus *Astrosmash* became *Astroblast*, *Armor Battle* became *Armor Ambush*, *Frog Bog* became *Frogs And Flies*. It was only the licensed games that kept the same titles, such as the *Tron* games, *Lock 'N' Chase* and *BurgerTime*. Eager to improve the 2600 offering and bring them closer to the original Intellivision games, Mattel's Design And Development department came up with a 'Super Charger' module that could be plugged into the Atari 2600. The module added 2K of RAM to the console and circuitry that allowed game cartridges four times larger than previously released. The first cartridge for the Super Charger was supposed to be an Atari version of *BurgerTime*. While the game was still in development however, sales results were coming in for the similar enhancement add-on for the Intellivision, the Intellivoice speech module. The figures turned out to be disappointing, though, with fewer than 350,000 Intellivoices sold, despite there being over 3 million consoles on the market. M Network's expansion module was promptly cancelled. Many of the programmers were pulling double duty producing both Intellivision games for Mattel and Atari 2600 titles for sister company M Network. As one of those people, Hal detailed what it









ARMOR AMBUSH

■ One of the Atari 2600's most iconic games is undoubtedly the original pack-in game *Combat*. So it wasn't surprising to see Mattel copy this game and improve upon it for the Intellivision release of *Armor Battle*. But the 2600 didn't have to be envious for long as the game was ported back to the Atari system as *Armor Ambush*. The main upgrade from the seminal *Combat* is the use of scenery on the battlefield. This can be used to hide behind and also as a weapon. This is because your shots will bounce off objects and fly across the screen at a new angle.



STAR STRIKE

■ Inspired by the trench run sequence from *Star Wars*, Dave Akers's *Star Strike* is one of the more graphically impressive games to be released by M Network. Here, you pilot a spaceship on a mission to wipe out five weapon silos on a giant alien mothership that is heading towards Earth. You must drop a bomb on each of these installations before the home world comes into view or it's game over! The enemy is also well aware of your presence. Thankfully, your ship is armed with unlimited lasers and bombs.

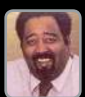
WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

KEITH ROBINSON



■ After being made redundant by Mattel, Keith moved away from videogames and became an illustrator. Keith returned to videogames in 1997 by forming Intellivision Productions to help the legacy of Mattel's console and its products live on. His first success comes with the *Intellivision Lives* compilation for PC and Nintendo DS. Although his health had been declining, it still came as a shock to all to learn that Keith Robinson passed away in June 2017. He will be sorely missed.

JERRY LAWSON



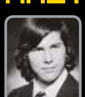
■ Jerry is perhaps best known as the creator of the world's first programmable games console the Fairchild Channel F. In 1980 Jerry left Fairchild and founded Videosoft, a development company which made software for the Atari 2600. He then formed an agreement to develop games for M Network through his new company. After this, Jerry became a consultant who worked juggernauts like Stevie Wonder and Stanford University. In 2003 we lost one of the industry's pioneers when Jerry passed away.

DAVE AKERS



■ After his time with Mattel, Dave secured a job at Atari Games helping to develop arcade hits such as *Klax*, *Toobin'*, *Escape From The Planet Of The Robot Monsters* and *Cyberball*. He left the historic arcade company in 1999 after it was closed down by Midway and then moved to Japan to become a teacher specialising in technology and English. He returned to videogames in 2013 developing two Intellivision games for Indie publishers Elektronite – *Match 5* and *Paddle Party*, both games were well received by the community.

HAL FINNEY



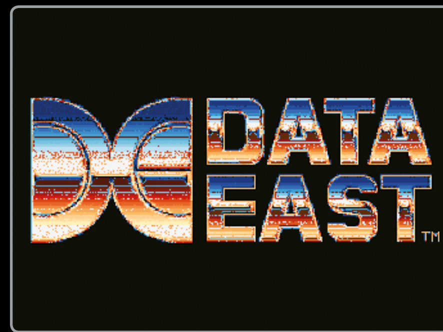
■ After his time at Mattel designing games for the Intellivision and Atari 2600, Hal stayed in the software industry but moved away from games. He took up work at McAfee where he would made his name again helping to develop its virus software. Cryptography became his main passion from there on and he worked in this field from 2004 until his retirement in 2011 after being diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease. He sadly lost the fight against this illness in August 2014.

THE DNA OF M NETWORK



INTELLIGENT TELEVISION

■ Mattel's key focus was always the Intellivision, but it still allowed ports of all its best games to appear on the Atari 2600 too albeit under a slightly amended name. The Atari versions of these games were often adapted to make better use of the somewhat inferior hardware, but sometimes they actually turned out to be more enjoyable.



ARCADE ACTION

■ With Coleco, Atari and Parker Brothers fighting over most of the big arcade licences, Mattel turned to a then-small company in Japan called Data East. The gamble soon paid off, as titles such as *Lock 'N' Chase*, *BurgerTime* and *Bump 'N' Jump* became big hits for the company and Data East itself would go on to become a respected and widely-known name.

was like going from the Mattel machine to Atari's. "The Intellivision was easier, but in a way there was more of a sense of satisfaction with the Atari since it was so difficult just to get a coherent picture on the screen. Everything in a 2600 program was timed to synchronise with the TV screen. With the Intellivision, we had interrupts to do the timing, and Dave had created the Exec, which was a system control and library ROM that was in all the units and hid a lot of the gory details. I always thought *Dark Cavern* was one of my more successful porting efforts. There is the usual Atari flashing when we get too many sprites on a scanline but it wasn't too bad. In fact, I think I may have even adjusted the 'AI' of the bad guys to try to avoid that – they would turn away if they were going to get on the same line as others. We couldn't control the player's motion, of course, so it wasn't prevented altogether."

A big part of M Network's business was in licences and its acquisition of the *Tron* videogame rights was without doubt its most famous. It published several games based on the franchise to try and get as much out of the licence at it could.



» [Atari 2600] *Kool-Aid Man* is an early example of advertising crossing over into videogames.

Given how protective Disney has become of its properties, we were surprised to discover that it relinquished all control over Mattel's offerings as Keith had explained to us. "Disney never even looked at any of the *Tron* games before they were released or even after! I was responsible for the entire *Solar Sailer* game and the graphics. A number of others helped out, threw in ideas, worked on optimising the code, but ultimately I was responsible and no one from Disney or Mattel was looking over my shoulder. Some of the licensors did take more of an interest in their properties, though. The *D&D* people did review the games before putting the trademark on them and Mattel Toys was very snickety about the *Masters Of The Universe* game, particularly the colours used in the Castle Grayskull graphic. But I don't recall anyone from Disney taking any interest in any of the *Tron* games at all!" Through an old interview with Hal we discovered that *Space Battle* was originally intended to be a game that was based on *Battlestar Galactica*. "I'm not sure of the specifics of why it had to be changed but *Space Battle* was originally going to be licensed from *Battlestar Galactica*," he said. "Originally there was music based on the original theme song, which obviously got taken out. The ships were supposed to look like Cylon flying saucers, but that never changed as the graphics back then were crude enough that the resemblance wasn't strong enough to be a concern. So if you look closely you can still see it!

The M Network label had proved to be enormously successful for Mattel and it had ideas to grow the branding to cover more systems. But unfortunately, like so many others in the industry, it failed to predict the great videogame crash. Keith detailed his memories of this, "In July 1983 as all the









SUPER SPORTS

■ The key focus of Mattel's marketing when it put its Intellivision console up against the industry-leading Atari 2600 was the 'realism' of its sports games. So it might seem somewhat surprising that it then chose to port several of these back across to Atari's console. These ports were definitely inferior games, however.

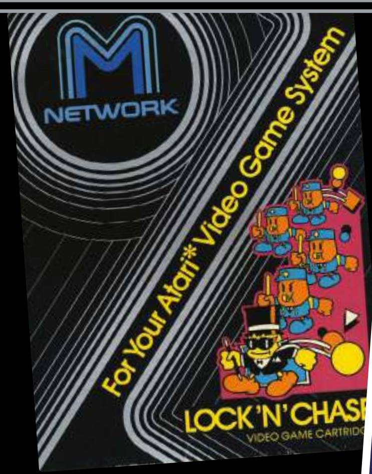
MOVIE MADNESS

■ Not just content with snapping up arcade licences, Mattel also sought out other popular forms of media that were ripe for the videogame treatment, too. Among the candidates were Disney's *Tron*, the kids TV show *Rocky And Bullwinkle*, *He-Man And The Masters Of The Universe* and, most bizarrely of all, Kool-Aid Man.

TELEGAMING

■ Unlike many of the companies that closed down after the devastating impact of the North American videogame crash, M Network managed to live on through UK-owned company Telegames which then republished its games on both sides of the pond for many years to come. This allowed a whole new audience to enjoy M Network's games.

> **"Disney never even looked at any of the Tron games"**
> Keith Robinson

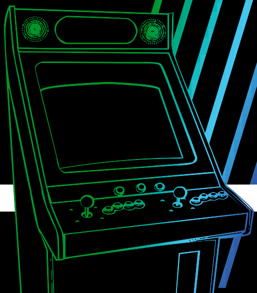




videogame companies started posting losses, Mattel revamped its management team and focus. From then on, games would be 'all flavours', that is, for all platforms. If you look at our commercial for *BurgerTime* on YouTube, for example, you'll see at the end it is advertised as available for Intellivision, Atari 2600, Colecovision, Apple II, IBM PC and Mattel Electronics' own computer the Aquarius. We had games in development for all of these platforms and were looking at C64 and Atari 8-bit at the end of 1983, too. So had Mattel Electronics and M Network continued, I'm sure we would have developed for Nintendo and Sega too as those consoles came to market." Dave Akers remembered the suddenness of it all, "For two years solid I worked on Atari 2600 games at Mattel, it was non-stop. But then, almost overnight, the games market just imploded in America. We were all shown the door, with open projects just left in limbo, and Mattel Electronics closed down for good." The closure of M Network saw all of its properties sold to Telegames, which republished nearly all its games in similar packaging just with a new logo. We asked Telegames CEO Pete Mortimer how this came about, "It was mostly handled on the US side, but we already had good dealing with Mattel having been the official UK distributor for the Intellivision, he said. "The opportunity came about to buy their back catalogue and as we still saw enormous value in the Atari 2600 it was a bit of a no-brainer."

M Network's life might have been a short one, but there's no doubting that it published some of the best third-party games for the Atari 2600 – aside from Activision, anyway – and it would have been interesting to see what would have become of it had it been allowed to continue on. The sad losses of Hal Finney, Keith Robinson and also Jerry Lawson, who was also the creator of the Fairchild Channel F, only enforces M Network's legacy in the industry and the great memories it left for the people who bought and enjoyed the company's games. Mattel is still very much a household name but M Network is a name that certainly shouldn't be forgotten, either. *

Special thanks to the interviewees and families of Keith Robinson and Hal Finney who allow their genius to live on for others to enjoy.



THE UNCONVERTED

Arcade games that never made it home

DEAD CONNECTION

DEVELOPER: **TAITO** YEAR: **1992** GENRE: **SHOOT-'EM-UP**



■ These piles of tyres can be used for cover, though as you might guess they don't last forever. Constant movement is key to survival here.

■ With no stairs in sight, your character has to clamber up this pile of junked cars in order to get a better shot at the legions of goons below.



■ Shooting this table will knock over the candles and cause a large fire, which can have the beneficial side-effect of taking out a couple of baddies

■ Our protagonist here is using a dodge roll to avoid the deadly machine gun fire. He can roll in any direction, and even up stairs if he chooses.

■ **We love Prohibition-era America – a place where the impossible dream of an alcohol-free society was realised, with no negative consequences whatsoever.** Nope, that mobster with the Tommy Gun was always there. What are you looking at? Keep walking. In any case it seems like Taito took a shine to the period too, as despite the intro's claim that it's 1953, it's clearly the setting for *Dead Connection*. The game is a shoot-'em-up which tasks one or two players with cleaning up the town, using only their considerable firepower.

Each stage tasks you with taking down a large number of bad guys (the first stage alone demands 30 bodies), and while each stage takes place on a single screen with no scrolling whatsoever, there's still plenty of scope for action. Stage layouts are nice and varied, with a mostly flat restaurant following a junkyard with moving vehicles and an enormous scrap pile to climb, while later on you'll find conveyor belts and more in the factory stage. Destructible cover is plentiful, power-ups include new guns, such as a spread-showering shotgun and a bullet-hosing machine gun, and your protagonist is able to dive and roll under enemy fire.



Dead Connection's nifty game design is matched well by the presentation. There are plenty of nice graphical touches during gameplay, as the scenery gets torn to shreds while you fight the city's gangs – tables collapse, bullet holes appear, fires ignite and the first stage even has a chandelier drop down on you. Between stages, it's just as good. Illustrated story scenes explain your arrival in each new area, and there are little introductions as a level starts (our favourite moment is stage three, in which your guy crashes through the windows of a restaurant in a car).

Given how cool this gangland shooter is, the only unsolved crime here is *Dead Connection*'s lack of a home conversion. It doesn't seem like the kind of game that would have been difficult to convert to the SNES or Mega Drive at the time, nor would it have posed any unusual problems if added to one of Taito's many retro compilations. We can only assume that *Dead Connection* just never found its audience in arcades – that's the only scenario which would provide a satisfying explanation for the complete lack of attention it has received.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE



SMASH TV

1990

■ The fast-paced and frantic twin-stick shooting in *Smash TV* is a world away from the slightly more considered pace of *Dead Connection*, but it's about as close as you'll get on a console. That uniqueness is part of what makes *Dead Connection* so appealing, though.

SPIKERS BATTLE

DEVELOPER: **AMUSEMENT VISION** YEAR: **2001** GENRE: **BEAT-'EM-UP**

■ If there's one thing you can say about the original *Spikeout*, it's that it was an ambitious game – nobody had yet nailed the formula for 3D beat-'em-ups, and multi-cabinet linked play was a novelty for the genre. This spin-off is characterised by a distinct lack of ambition. The game puts you into enclosed arenas with a few enemies, and it's your job to beat them all over the best of three rounds. There are lots of items scattered about, from basketballs to knives and flamethrowers, and enemies drop power-ups when defeated.

The fighting is fine, with lots of techniques to discover and utilise and eight distinct characters. However, the arenas in *Spikers Battle* are dull – simple circular or rectangular areas without even the most basic of distinguishing features like platforms. The exception is the second stage, set in a restaurant, which has windows you can throw enemies through and is full of tables and chairs to pick up. It's also a bit too difficult, thanks to the fact that enemies can team up to juggle your character, inflicting damage with no way to defend. It's okay, but we can see why there was no Dreamcast version.



» [Arcade] The *Spikeout* formula loses a lot when the linked cabinets and open stages are stripped away.

CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

POWER STONE 2

2000

■ With a more suitable camera and vastly more enjoyable stages, Capcom's four-player brawler is a much better bet for anyone who happens to be in the mood for some unconventional fighting action. The fact that it happens to have better character balance is just icing on the cake, really.

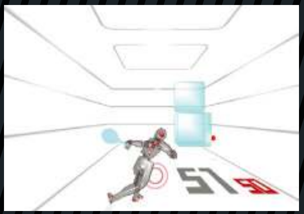


CONVERTED ALTERNATIVE

COSMIC SMASH

2001

■ *Cosmic Smash* offers a different mixture of games, going with squash and *Breakout*, but the futuristic aesthetic shows that it's cut from a similar cloth to *Goalie Ghost*. There's no forced split-screen element here, though, as *Cosmic Smash* is a single-player game all the way.



GOALIE GHOST

DEVELOPER: **BALLY SENTE** YEAR: **1984** GENRE: **SPORTS**

■ *Goalie Ghost* is a strange sports game, sitting somewhere between football, tennis and air hockey. The aim is simple: defend your goal and put the ball in the other player's goal. Playing the game is simple thanks to the intuitive control scheme, with a trackball for movement and one button to jump – the ball is kicked automatically when your player collides with it. Games are played to a time limit, and the player who scored the most goals wins. To spice things up, the game has some special features. A headed ball will bounce around like a mad thing, making its height hard to predict as it heads towards your goal. The other big one is that after a certain amount of time, extra balls get added into the mix – each kick off can have up to three.



» [Arcade] You need to be very quick on the trackball to deal with three balls.

Vaguely nonsensical name aside, *Goalie Ghost* is good fun. It's not groundbreaking stuff, for sure, but it works well and the futuristic visual style holds up relatively well. The CPU opponent is a little on the tough side, even on novice difficulty, but if you play against a friend of a similar skill level you should both enjoy the experience.

BEST LEFT IN THE ARCADE

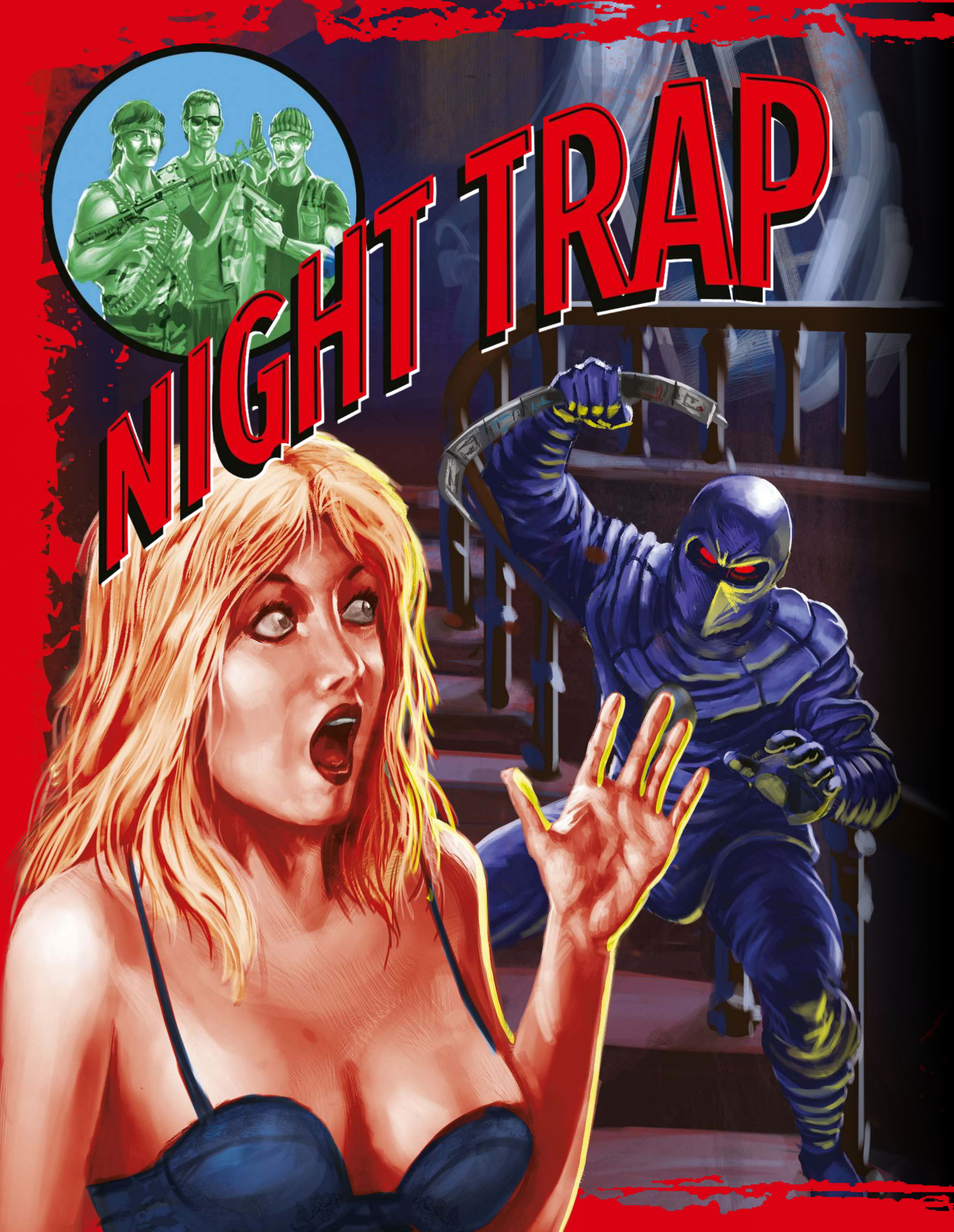
CAPCOM SPORTS CLUB

DEVELOPER: **CAPCOM** YEAR: **1997** GENRE: **SPORTS**

■ We understand the appeal that *Capcom Sports Club* must have had to arcade operators – after all, getting three sports games into one cabinet can only broaden that cabinet's appeal and thus get more money. However, if you're a player it doesn't make a whole lot of sense as you only get to play one of the three games. None of the games were actively bad, they were just outclassed by their existing competitors – the basketball component is weaker than *NBA Jam* and the football component is weaker than the likes of *Super Sidekicks* and *Virtua Striker*. If you were in the position to play an arcade game, you'd probably pick any of those first.

Though *Capcom Sports Club* never received a full conversion to any home console, the tennis game did end up forming the basis of a Japan-only Dreamcast game by the name of *Net De Tennis*, which got its name from the fact that it could be played online. It was passable, but rather predictably weaker than the sublime *Virtua Tennis*.




NIGHT TRAP



» [3DO] It's the most infamous scene in the entire game, and one which basically gave us age ratings.

They say that controversy creates cash, and Digital Pictures certainly found that to be true with the original full-motion video nasty. Nick Thorpe looks back at a game which found fame with both players and parents…

***Night Trap* is a game that almost shouldn't exist.** Not because it's bad (although its detractors certainly have some valid points), but because of everything that happened to it along its journey from conception to release, and beyond.

The original design for *Night Trap* has its roots in *Scene Of The Crime*, a demo game produced for the ill-fated Hasbro Control-Vision – a console which interfaced with a VCR for its primary graphical output, allowing players the choice of up to four video tracks, all running simultaneously. *Scene Of The Crime* positioned players as a security camera operator, watching a series of feeds with the goal of protecting a wealthy man's vault. The demo went down well with execs, and the system was put into production alongside an expanded version of the camera game concept.

The team kept the basic concept, but in order to inject some interactivity they moved from solving a crime to preventing it. The production version of the game would feature ninja burglars, who could be thwarted with elaborate traps set around the mansion – and instead of just protecting money, you also needed to protect the daughter of the ▶

Q&A: TYLER HOGLE

The Screaming Villains developer discusses the original game and the new anniversary version

How did you first encounter *Night Trap*, and what did you make of it?

I first played *Night Trap* in 1995 when I was in the seventh grade. There was always that rich kid at school who owned a Sega CD. I was at his house and he was showing it off since he just got it for Christmas. I ended up playing *Night Trap* first because it had a cool cover, but I honestly didn't play the game very long because I didn't understand it.

***Night Trap* was pretty well received at its launch, but often gets a rough ride from the gaming press today. Why do you think that is?**

When you see an FMV game in 1992 it's groundbreaking because you haven't seen anything like it before, but looking at it today it's clear that they did not age very well at all. People either forget or don't know that *Night Trap* was made in 1986-1987 for something that supported VHS tapes and wasn't intended for something that could barely play video five years later from a CD-ROM. Age and YouTube could also play a factor in this. One thing I kept hearing a lot was, 'I have never played this game before but it sucks,' which leads me to believe that this comment is being made by someone who watched a video on YouTube of someone else playing the game very badly and making jokes the whole time, and there's a lot of those types of videos out there. I think if it was released in the late Eighties like it was originally planned then it probably wouldn't get as much hate as it does now.

How did you get the chance to work on the anniversary edition?

During the summer of 2016 I was looking for something new to work on and noticed that some fans of *Night Trap* tried to recreate the game themselves. I was working on some mobile games and thought the idea of *Night Trap* on a phone was pretty rad, so I created a prototype in about three days that ran on an Android device. A friend of mine came up with the idea of posting a video of it being played on YouTube just to see what kind of reaction it would get. A couple of websites saw it and decided to contact the owners of *Night Trap* to see if they had any information about it or if they were even involved. SegaBits.com contacted Tom Zito and FMVWorld.com contacted Rob Fulop. Both of them said that they had no involvement, of course, but what stuck out to me was in Rob's response to the prototype he said, 'The developer of this demo needs to negotiate a licence from the *Night Trap* copyright holder to make this real,' so to me that sounded like they were interested in making this official. I was able to track down Tom's email address, he gave me a call the next day and after five minutes of talking he asked what I wanted to do with it so I just blurted out, 'I want to release this officially if that's cool with you,' and then he said, 'Wonderful! Let's work something out!'



Other than the improved video quality, what improvements can fans expect from the anniversary edition?

When you're remaking an FMV game there's only so much you can do so I tried to do things to make it feel more like a game. Load times are gone, so switching rooms is now instant, and when you press a button to trap an Auger the game should respond immediately instead of having a delayed response when showing the trapping sequence. The original game was designed to have a good/bad outcome on specific scenarios but a lot of that was changed when the game switched to Sega, so some of those elements are put back in there. For example, there's a part in the game where a member of SCAT goes upstairs and encounters an Auger and you can trap the SCAT member.

One complaint I saw in a lot in older reviews was not being able to watch the main story without trapping Augers. The game couldn't be changed since it was filmed 30 years ago, so we created a 'Theatre' section in the game where you can now watch all story-related videos without having to worry about trapping. Something involving random Augers was another thing that I saw a lot of, so we created a new mode called Survivor. Augers will now randomly appear throughout the house and you go through endless waves and the difficulty increases with each round.

Would you vote in favour of a law requiring all karaoke bars to have the *Night Trap* theme available for play?

As a fan? Definitely. As a developer? Hell no!





» [3DO] How did Hasbro decide that sci-fi neck drills were better than people getting punched?

household and her friends. However, concerns over violence that could be imitated switched the setting – first by embracing the supernatural, adopting vampires as the antagonistic forces, and later adding sci-fi weaponry to further remove any reproducible aspect of the game's attacks.

In the end, the game turned into *Night Trap*, a pastiche of Eighties horror films. Teenagers have been going missing, and their last known location is a remote lakeside house owned by the Martin family. As a member of the Special Control Attack Team, you've discovered that the house has an advanced security system with eight live feeds and a series of traps. As another six teenagers arrive for a sleepover, your goal is to use this hijacked system to observe the house, use the traps to protect people from mysterious black-clad intruders that enter the property, and help your undercover agent Kelly find out what's going on.

Despite having shot the footage for both this game and a shoot-'em-up project (*Sewer Shark*), Hasbro dropped plans to release the Control-Vision, due to rising hardware costs and the realisation that game production was set to run to a few million dollars per game. However, the shelved footage was acquired by a new company called Digital Pictures, which would find a new outlet for the games with the advent of CD-ROM gaming. Sega's Mega-CD was powerful enough to run streaming video from the CD, albeit at a much lower quality than VHS – limitations on colour and resolution gave Mega-CD video a grainy look.

Though the video was bad then and is practically intolerable now, it's not hard to see how *Night Trap* once felt like the future of entertainment, because at its heart is a B-movie that you can watch however you choose. Maybe you'll stick with the main girls and see what they get up, or perhaps you'll follow the kid brother who quietly leaves the group to look around the house. You could even choose to visit another room entirely, hoping to catch an intruder or stumble on another member of the family going about their business. It's no horror classic, but it doesn't take itself seriously and it's fun to watch it a few times over in order to see alternative scenes and get the whole story, especially given that the game is less than half an hour long.

The problem is the game on top of that interactive B-movie. The team behind *Night Trap* sought to add a greater deal of interactivity to videogames based on full-motion video, and they succeeded – what you do in *Night Trap* is a world away from the 'press button to continue movie' formula employed by the likes of *Dragon's Lair*. However, the appeal of success in those games was getting to see that movie. Success at

HOUSE GUESTS

Take a look at the participants in this drama…



LIEUTENANT SIMMS
PLAYED BY: **J BILL JONES**

■ Your commander for this SCAT operation, he'll give you your orders and cut you off if you fail to protect the guests. Late in the plot, he makes a direct intervention in the house.



KELLY MEDD
PLAYED BY: **DANA PLATO**

■ An undercover SCAT agent investigating the disappearances at the Martin family residence, she's unarmed and in need of protection. She's the token recognisable face, too.



CINDY
PLAYED BY: **TRACY MATHESON**

■ The oblivious member of the group – she doesn't realise anything's wrong until biting into a 'cherry' popsicle. She's also the only one that is shown to become a vampire herself if not saved.



LISA
PLAYED BY: **DEBRA PARKS**

■ Here's the arch-fashionista of the group, and the older sister of Danny. Lisa is the first of the girls to be directly attacked, and she's the star of the game's infamous bathroom scene.



EDDIE
PLAYED BY: **WILLIAM BERTRAND**

■ 'Weird' Eddie is a neighbour of the Martins, who knows that they're dangerous. Of course, his reputation means that nobody believes him. He invents a laser gun that fries Augers.



VICTOR MARTIN
PLAYED BY: **JON R KAMAL**

■ As the patriarch of the family, Victor's main concern is the production and bottling of the special vintage so beloved by the Martins. He also designed and built the traps in the house.



SHEILA MARTIN
PLAYED BY: **MOLLY STARR**

■ Devoted wife to Victor, Sheila's main concern is feeding the Augers – a concern referred to as 'charity' by her husband. Building the elaborate security system was her idea initially.



SARAH MARTIN
PLAYED BY: **SUZY COTE**

■ The devious daughter of the Martins looks sweet, but she's the bait in the trap. She befriends the girls at the mall to lure them to her house, and seems to take charge of the hunt.

Q&A: JOSH FAIRHURST

We find out why Limited Run Games has taken on the new version of Night Trap

How did you first encounter *Night Trap*, and what did you make of it?
Growing up, I had a neighbour across the street who had a Sega CD. I had a Genesis but I couldn't afford the CD add-on back then – he showed me a few games but the one that stood out for me was *Night Trap*. I had never encountered an FMV game at the time so the idea of controlling a movie was kind of mind-blowing. This may sound kind of ridiculous, but I remember that moment as vividly as I remember my first experience with *Mario 64* on an in-store demo kiosk. Seeing a game like *Night Trap* was eye-opening.

I acquired a Sega CD of my own several years later and became a huge fan of the platform and of *Night Trap*.

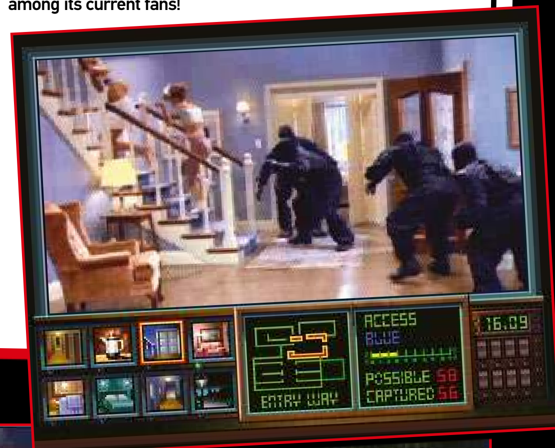
Were you surprised to discover that the game still has an active fan following today?
Not really, I'm nostalgic for some stuff I feel like very few are nostalgic for (*MegaRace*, for example). For nearly half a decade, FMV games were king and sold millions upon millions of copies. I don't think that was just due to the novelty – some of these experiences were legitimately good! It doesn't surprise me at all that people are fond of the genre and *Night Trap* in particular since I think that game was many people's gateway into the genre.

Why did Limited Run Games choose to produce *Night Trap 25th Anniversary Edition* as a physical game?
I'm a huge Sega fan so having the opportunity to publish something so intrinsically tied to a Sega platform was a big deal for me. Historically, it's a pretty important game given its links to the formation of the Entertainment Software Ratings Board. I also love the game, so there's that.

How did you decide on the patch and cassette as extras for the *Collector's Edition*?
I feel like the theme song to the game is almost as infamous as the game itself at this point so I wanted to include it in some capacity with the *Collector's Edition*. *Night Trap* doesn't really have a full soundtrack so it didn't really make sense to do a CD with only five minutes of music – I thought doing a cassette would be more fun. With the patch, I wanted to do something thematically linked to the game. In the 3DO release of the game – and only that release – there is a logo for the in-game Special Control Attack Team (SCAT). I thought we could do something cool with that and create a patch that members of the team could wear on their gear. The patch is sewn on ballistic fibre so Augers can't drill through it!

Why do you think the game remains so popular?
There are a few reasons: it's a fun game with solid mechanics, the film aspect has the same appeal as any B-horror movie, and to a lot of people - this was their first experience with CD-ROM gaming. There's a lot to be nostalgic about with *Night Trap*.

I'd say that *Night Trap* is pretty much the grand-daddy of the trap-'em-up genre that *Five Nights At Freddy's* has popularised. There's a really solid core in this game that a lot of people missed due to the controversy. I hope with the remaster, more people are able to see and discover what has made *Night Trap* so popular among its current fans!





ASHLEY
PLAYED BY: **ALISON RHEA**
■ The relatively level-headed girl in the group. She's a matter of special interest for Tony as she seems to resemble someone from his past by the name of Madeleine.



MEGAN
PLAYED BY: **CHRISTY FORD**
■ Megan is apparently a bit of a prankster. She is also irritation made flesh, thanks to her annoying antics. You can actually trap her 'accidentally' late in the game, which is rather tempting.



DANNY
PLAYED BY: **JOSH GODDARD**
■ Lisa's genre-savvy little brother knows that something is up with the Martin household. After stumbling into the Augers, he finds out what – and with the local weirdo's help, he fights back.



SCAT TEAM
PLAYED BY: **ARTHUR BURGHARDT, HEIDI VON BRECHT, DEKE ANDERSON, BLAKE GIBBONS, ROY EISENSTEIN**
■ These operatives are also performing reconnaissance on the Martin house, and will back you up if things go horribly wrong.



JEFF MARTIN
PLAYED BY: **ANDRAS JONES**
■ Jeff's main concern is the security of the house – he's the character to watch for security code changes, and in one bad ending he disconnects your security override.



TONY
PLAYED BY: **GIOVANNI LEMM**
■ Despite sharing the same secret as the Martin family, Tony is a reluctant participant in the night's fun and tries to save Ashley. He isn't a fan of Kelly snooping around the house, though.

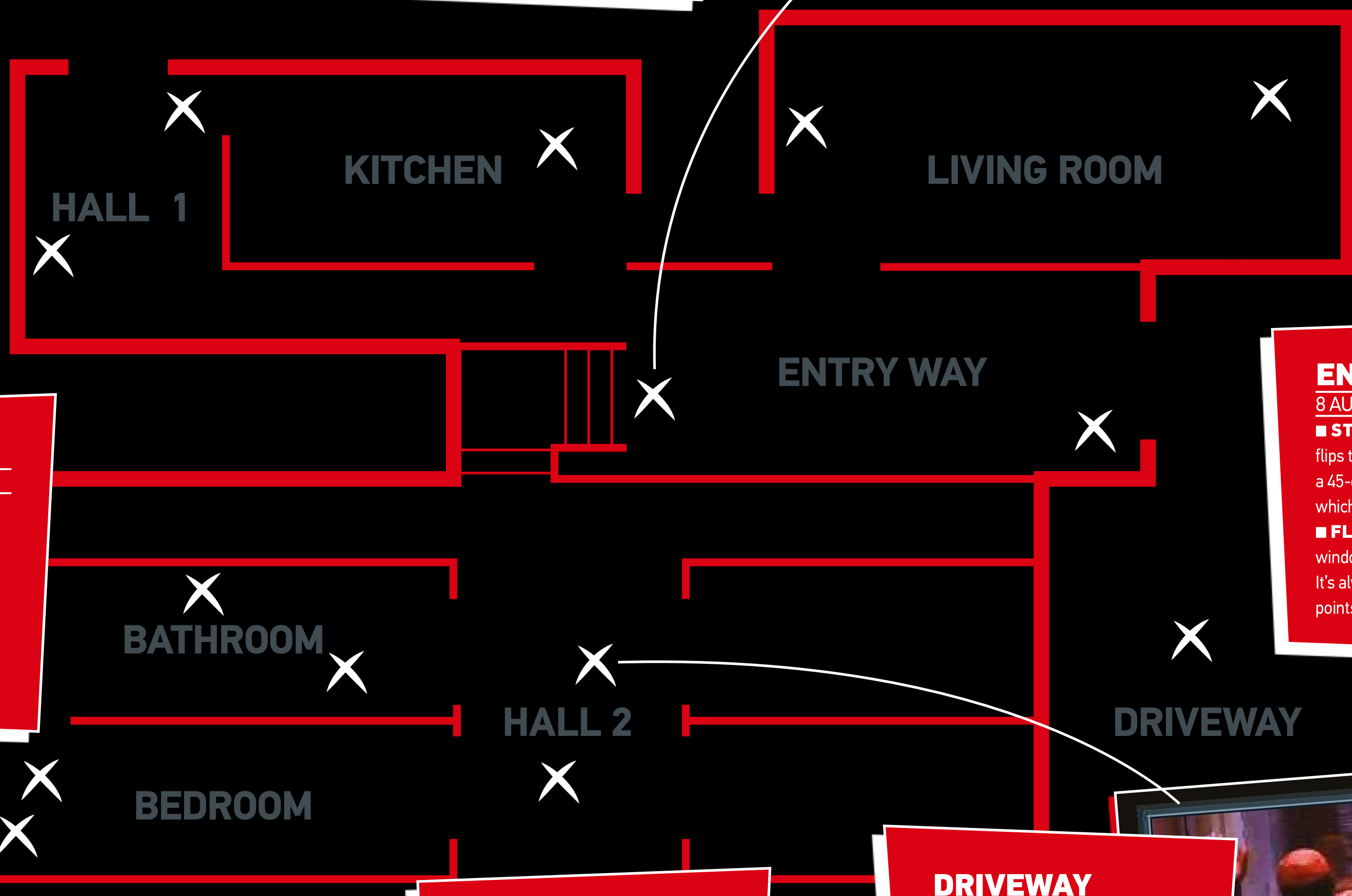


AUGERS
PLAYED BY: **VARIOUS**
■ These vampiric victims lean heavily on the 'dead' part of undead. Their skin is falling off, hence the bodysuits, and they seek blood to complete their transformation into full vampires.



TRAP MAP

The eight rooms of the Martin household offer lots of traps – here's a complete look at how you can cleanse this place of intruders…







KITCHEN

3 AUGERS

■ **FLOOR TRAP** Situated over by the big fridge freezers, there's another excellent false floor trap. You will rarely find that you actually need to use this one, though.

LIVING ROOM

20 AUGERS

■ **BOOKSHELF TRAP** Anyone who wanders by the left side of the bookshelf is asking for trouble – the whole shelf revolves, pushing unwelcome guests into a trap.

■ **FLOOR TRAP** The right of the room contains a simple but always effective false floor trap. Down the chasm you go, baddies!

HALLWAY 1

17 AUGERS

■ **WALL TRAP** A false wall on one side of the hallway opens up, while the opposite one extends out to push intruders into the trap.

■ **FLOOR TRAP** Right by the security override cable, there's a simple false floor trap. Unfortunately, you can't protect the override with it.

ENTRY WAY

8 AUGERS

■ **STAIRS TRAP** This excellent trap flips the steps of the staircase up to a 45-degree angle, creating a slide which delivers intruders into the trap.

■ **FLOOR TRAP** Just by the window, you'll find a false floor trap. It's always good to cover entry and exit points, isn't it?

BATHROOM

5 AUGERS

■ **WALL TRAP** Stepping on the scales in this bathroom is bad news – the corner wall will quickly turn around, swallowing you whole.

■ **FLOOR TRAP** Between the shower and the exit into the hallway, there's a classic false floor trap to satisfy any fans of Mr Burns.

BEDROOM

14 AUGERS

■ **BED TRAP** This elaborate trap uses a false wardrobe to push the intruder onto a bed, which then flings the helpless person backwards out of the window.

■ **FLOOR TRAP** Right between the window and the doorway to the bathroom, you'll find another false floor.

HALLWAY 2

18 AUGERS

■ **CHAMBER TRAP** A glass chamber quickly surrounds you, with red lights alerting you to your imminent demise by way of a long drop.

■ **FLOOR TRAP** Closer to the camera, and the entrance to the bedroom, lies a regular false floor that is waiting for anyone who avoided the containment chamber.

DRIVEWAY

10 AUGERS

■ **CATAPULT TRAP** Don't creep around on the Martin family's roof – you'll be flung off spectacularly via catapult if you try.



» [3DO] Megan's found the unfortunate SCAT member having his blood bottled.

Night Trap requires that you basically ignore the movie in order to trap Augers – if you're shooting for a perfect game, you need to trap 95 of them in 25 minutes, with some captures occurring within seconds of each other. Worse still, some of the design is downright counterintuitive. On more than one occasion, the game will present you with a girl in obvious danger, but stopping to monitor this situation will cause you to miss a random Auger milling about in another room.

Despite the design flaws, *Night Trap* received a warm reception from the press due to its novelty and its advances over the old LaserDisc games. *Mean Machines* Sega gave it 89% and called it "the most advanced and innovative Mega-CD game seen yet." In an 84% review, Adrian Pittowski of *Sega Force* claimed that "the crazy way Augs are trapped and the way the actors camp it up gives *Night Trap* an incredibly tacky yet humorous feel." *GamesMaster* offered it 85%, deeming it a "must have" too.

But as we know, that wasn't the end of the story as controversy over the game erupted in the spring of 1993, spreading from USA to the rest of the world. In the UK, the *Daily Mail* dubbed the game "The Sega Sickener" and grabbed some rent-a-quote politicians to condemn the game, including Conservative MP Terry Dicks who declared that, "The manufacturers are evil and ought to be punished for promoting this game." Sega Ozisoft declined to release the game in Australia after it came to the attention of various politicians, but this didn't do much to quell concerns and the game was frequently mentioned during the development of the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995.





» [PS4] The PS4 version of *Night Trap* was released just as we went to press. Expect a review in the next issue.

The next major flashpoint for the game was in December 1993, when clips were shown before the United States Congress during a hearing on violent videogames. Nintendo's Howard Lincoln used the game as a rod with which to beat his business rivals, claiming, "I can't let you sit here and buy this nonsense that this Sega *Night Trap* game was somehow only meant for adults. […] Small children bought this at Toys R Us and he [Sega's Bill White] knows that as well as I do." Within days, Toys R Us had withdrawn the game from its US stores, and international press attention was focused on the game again – even in the UK, despite the game carrying a 15 rating from the BBFC. That said, Sega hardly helped itself – when questioned by *The Independent*, a spokesman for Sega Europe offered the following bizarre defence: "Yes there is, how shall I say, women in underwear being dragged off by the aliens. But the game is so difficult hardly anyone ever gets that far." By 1994, the videogame industry had introduced self-regulated ratings systems (ESRB in NA, ELSPA in the UK) which quietened critics for a time.

25 years later, it all seems so quaint. Similar FMV games entered the market over the years that followed, exposing the limitations of the format, and the boundaries of taste would be pushed much farther by the likes of *Phantasmagoria*. But *Night Trap* is a key piece of history – a technically ambitious game that blew people away upon first viewing, made much more enticing by the stamp of parental disapproval. Without it, videogames would be a different medium today, and it's worth revisiting *Night Trap* for that reason alone. ✱

CONVERSION CAPERS

Here's how the four existing versions of Night Trap stack up against one another…



MEGA-CD

1992

■ The original and most common version of *Night Trap* is also the worst. The colour limitations of the hardware necessitate massive dithering in the small FMV window, and the presentation is ugly. It does have an exclusive version of the intro sequence, though.

32X CD

1994



■ Adding a 32X to your Mega-CD setup allows you to play an enhanced version of *Night Trap*. The presentation has been fully overhauled, with a much larger video window and better colour reproduction, but there's still a grainy quality to the footage.

3DO

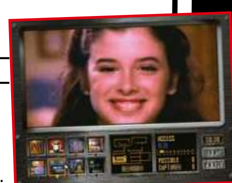
1994



■ *Night Trap* on the 3DO offers slightly clearer and brighter video than the 32X version of the game, but the frame rate is reduced by 20 per cent, down to just 12 frames a second. Personal preference will decide which approach you favour. It also sports a touched-up version of the new 32X interface.

PC

1995



■ A new mouse-driven interface is introduced for the PC version of *Night Trap*, which speeds up your ability to transition between rooms. You can save, too. The video is the worst of the improved versions, with 32X image quality and 3DO framerate.

CLASSIC MOMENTS

Sunset Riders

» **PLATFORM:** ARCADE » **DEVELOPER:** KONAMI » **RELEASED:** 1991

The signature moment of *Sunset Riders* comes on the second level of the game, as you find yourself at the reigns of a galloping stallion accosted by mounted bad guys in the Arizona desert. Returning fire as the majestic scenery rushes by, you notice you're riding alongside a railroad track. All of a sudden, a massive locomotive steams up from behind, while a wagon appears ahead with an outlaw throwing logs at your expensive thoroughbred charge. After dispatching the unruly wagon guy, what follows is a thrilling firefight with the pistol-packing occupants of the train's carriages, who pop up from its windows taking pot shots at you. All of which is happening as further mounted bandits attack. It's a pure Saturday-morning matinee adrenaline rush, neatly segueing into the end-of-stage boss fight as the train pulls up at a frontier town station, leaving you alone with your bounty, Hawkeye Hank Hatfield. *



BIO

One of Konami's most beloved Nineties videogames, *Sunset Riders* is a rollicking old-time western adventure starring four plucky bounty hunters, with eight levels to traverse. It's a scrolling shooter in the vein of the *Contra* series, and the similarity is no coincidence. *Sunset Riders* was directed by Hideyuki Tsujimoto, who also produced the *Super Contra* arcade game, and the shoot-'em-up *Lightning Fighters*. *Sunset Riders* is a much more humorous game than the likes of *Contra*, though, packed with gorgeous cartoon style animation.

MORE CLASSIC SUNSET RIDERS MOMENTS

Stampede!



Halfway through the first level you come across a little farmstead on the prairie, where you're greeted by the thunderous approach of stampeding cattle. Your only escape is to run full tilt along their backs, which, as any cowboy will tell you, is by far the best way to deal with rampaging bulls.

Deadly Territory



While not exactly politically correct, *Sunset Riders* does throw in a level where you enter a canyon-side Native American encampment, complete with this traditional raffia work cable car. This stage was notably altered for the SNES version, along with the end boss, originally named Chief Scalpem.

Saloon Skulduggery



Being a Sunset Rider isn't just about guts, glory, and taking down the bad guys. It's also about being a hit with the locals, especially in this saloon bar boss fight. After, swinging on a chandelier, rescuing saloon workers, and stealing a few cheeky kisses you're treated to an impromptu can-can dance as a reward.

High Noon



As a break from running left to right shooting cowboy baddies why not take a break with this bonus minigame where you shoot yet more cowboy baddies in pseudo 3D? Cropping up after the two train-themed sections in the game, it's a matter of pushing the stick in the direction the baddies appear, fast.



Minority Report

INTERESTING GAMES YOU'VE NEVER PLAYED





ATARI ST

Nowadays, it's quite fashionable to be critical of the Atari ST's weaknesses in the games department, but Kim Justice has arrived to cover some of the price-tastic computer's unheralded highlights. Did you play any of them?

EYE OF HORUS

■ DEVELOPER: **DENTON DESIGNS** ■ YEAR: **1989**

■ **The Denton Designs story is one that spans across the whole of the Eighties and involves the likes of Imagine and Ocean Software, but by the end of the decade we're in the last chapters – the majority of the studio's founders had left by now.** Still, that didn't stop Denton from making *Eye Of Horus* – a game that might have been a little out of time by 1989, but still stands as a solid adventure.

As you might expect from the name, *Eye Of Horus* has something of an Egyptian theme. You play as Horus (naturally) and you must find the pieces of your father Osiris that are dotted around a labyrinth, before using them to defeat your dad's killer, Set – the god of 'bad stuff'. Fortunately, however, Horus is the god of the sky, meaning that he has the ability to transform into a falcon and fly around whenever he pleases, which comes in handy quite often, especially as large groups of enemies plucked straight from the pages of Egyptian lore – scrolls, asps and the like – will be set upon you as you try to complete your quest. Not to fret, as you can also find amulets that will upgrade your weapon or help you out in other ways, thus making it easier to cast down these hordes and ultimately get the better of your rival deity.

The game plays like something of a hybrid; we have the classic maze-like arcade adventure, the sort that were a dime a dozen back in the day, but being able to become a falcon at any time is important in fights, which often play out like something you'd find in a shoot-'em-up. There's quite a lot of enemies around, and you'll probably spend more time in bird form than in regular form, unless you're picking up items. It feels in many ways like an updated version of Imagine Software's classic *Alchemist*, which covered somewhat similar ground with another hero capable of humanoid/avian metamorphosis – considering that Denton Designs was born from the ashes of Imagine (*Alchemist*'s designer, the late Ian Weatherburn, was a part of the group in the early days), that feels somewhat appropriate.

Whether *Eye Of Horus* is possibly the last 'true' Imagine game or not is a curious subject, but the game is certainly quality. One of the best things about the ST, oddly, is that you could get somewhat Spectrum-esque games like this one only with better graphics, but you keep the Spectrum's AY synth-based sounds – it's a strange combination, but it happens to work a lot of the time, certainly in this case. *Eye Of Horus* is a compelling adventure with a lot of shooter-based excitement packed into it too, and it's seldom not fun to fool around and play as an actual legitimate god. It's true that by the end of the Eighties, it may have looked outdated as a game and something that belonged more on the 8-bits – reviews of the time focused on that. Today, it stands as a farewell to the 8-bit arcade adventure – one that's worth sacrificing a little bit of your bank balance for.

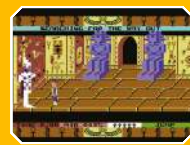
IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

ALCHEMIST
ZX SPECTRUM, 1983



■ Ian Weatherburn's arcade adventure was one of the original Imagine Software's most successful and best-received games, one where the titular alchemist can turn into an eagle at will. While *Eye Of Horus* is not an official sequel, chances are good that it wouldn't exist at all if it weren't for *Alchemist*.

ENTOMBED
COMMODORE 64, 1985



■ If you're looking for more Egyptian-themed antics and quests, *Entombed* might be for you – an arcade adventure by Ultimate Play The Game. People tend to be pretty mixed on the *Sir Arthur Pendragon* series and Ultimate's Commodore 64 output in general, but *Entombed* is arguably the best game of the trilogy.

WAXWORKS
AMIGA, 1992



■ For something completely different, how about this gory little dungeon RPG from Horrorsoft with an Egyptian setting? Travel your way through various stages of time on a quest to rid your family of an ancient curse where you'll die in ways so gruesome they would make Treguard vomit. Oh, nasty.

IN DEPTH



PICK UP THE PIECES
■ These are various items that you can pick up, some of which you'll need to traverse the labyrinth. Normal enough, but some of them are actually little bits of your dead dad.

RUNNING ON EMPTY
■ This fancy scorpion on a ball represents your current health – the further left it is, the closer you are to death. Fortunately, you do have a bunch of lives to help you out.

I'M LIKE A BIRD
■ This is Horus, our hero. He's currently a bird – you fly by pressing Up, and Horus goes back to human form when he touches the ground. You'll spend a lot of time like this.

OPPOSITES ATTRACT
■ These magnet-type things are one of the game's enemies. There's a lot of them and it's usually best to attack them as a bird – the human Horus is pretty weak against enemies.

Minority Report

ORK

■ PUBLISHER: **PSYGNOSIS** ■ YEAR: **1991**

■ **When you capture a games-playing public with a world in the way that Psygnosis did with *Shadow Of The Beast*, one logical response to that is to make more games like that.** Of course, Psygnosis was never shy of making games that looked like they were plucked from a piece of Roger Dean album art in the first place, and that's what they did with *Ork* – a game from the Liverpool-based owlish folk that's fallen somewhat under the radar.

Ork plays somewhat like a proggier and more puzzle-laden *Turrican* – there are lots of enemies for the alien Kul-Kabul to kill and platforms to navigate, but also puzzles to solve and items to find. He can also fly, but this ability is limited by the fuel you have. The game's world is very reminiscent of *SOTB* indeed, and it's easy to see why the game might have been disregarded as Psygnosis basically plagiarising themselves – however, *Ork* possesses a level of gameplay that *SOTB* itself wouldn't attain until its third instalment, with ever more challenging levels, controls that actually work well and sensible puzzles marrying nicely with the angular, artsy creations.

Of all the versions of this game, the Atari ST version is perhaps the most loved – while *Ork* does move smoother on the Amiga, the graphics and game seem to lack something and it all appears flat. The ST, on the other hand, gives the game a nice dirty look that plays to the system's plus points – the world looks much more grimier and lived in as opposed to feeling untouched. It's just a shame that there's no in-game music to speak of – but otherwise, *Ork* is one of the better shooter-adventure hybrids around on the system.





» [Atari ST] Kul-Kabul will fight against various aliens on his quest, including these weird things who like to climb up posts and bother you.



» [Atari ST] Here's Kul-Kabul taking flight. Strange alien creatures are always that much more awesome when they're jet-propelled, aren't they?

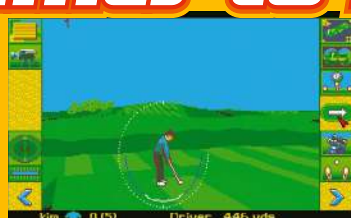
More Games To Play



» VAXINE

■ DEVELOPER: **US GOLD**
■ YEAR: **1990**

■ If you've ever wanted to be a blood cell charged with stopping your host from becoming one of those bad idiots who goes around catching diseases, then this is apparently an accurate simulation of the process. In *Vaxine*, you shoot spheres at other spheres of the same colour on a 3D grid before they bond with each other and cause you damage. A strange little game that's very fun once you figure out what on earth's going on.



» MICROPROSE GOLF

■ DEVELOPER: **MICROPROSE**
■ YEAR: **1991**

■ Golf games tend to work on computers because they offer all the fun and relaxation of a day out on the tees without the extortionate cost of buying your own clubs or listening to drunken old club members bellowing at one another on the 19th hole. *Microprose Golf* is one of the better ways to do it on the ST with all the usual options you'd want, and it's a good alternative to the more famous likes of *PGA Tour* and *Leaderboard*.



» HELTER SKELTER

■ DEVELOPER: **AUDIOGENIC**
■ YEAR: **1989**

■ A puzzle game that seems pretty easy on the surface – all you have to do is touch some enemies with your bouncy ball, and you win. However, you have to touch them in a specific order – if you touch any out of order they multiply, and the time is pretty tight. An engaging game that's a lot trickier than it seems especially as it goes on, but one that's very addicting – it's incredibly fun to simply bounce around everywhere.



» NO BUDDIES LAND

■ DEVELOPER: **EXPOSE SOFTWARE**
■ YEAR: **1991**

■ How do you solve the ST's issues with horizontal scrolling? Why, just make a game that scrolls vertically! *No Buddies Land* is a solid example of the rarer vertical platformer – the graphics aren't a whole lot to speak of and the difficulty is rather unforgiving, but there's a cute hero to play as and a tension in the air as you're forever chased by a body of water as you make your way up the tower. A solid little diversion.

SON SHU SHI

■ DEVELOPER: EXPOSE SOFTWARE ■ YEAR: 1991

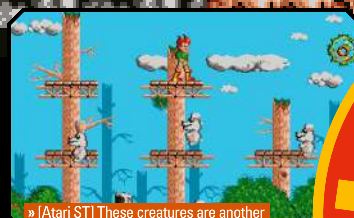
■ **It's easy to say that the Atari ST cannot do horizontal-scrolling platformers due to its limitations, but *Son Shu Shi* provides a solid argument to the contrary – a Chinese-themed platformer that actually moves very well.** The big-haired hero and the enemies he faces allow for something of a different aesthetic to the norm – a European game that's influenced by Asian themes. The result is like a weird arcade take on a NES platformer – it's what an ST port of *Conquest For The Crystal Palace* might have looked like if mixed with *Venus The Flytrap*.

Son Shu Shi is technically superb for the ST and a game that's worth playing – a solid-controlling arcade platformer by any measure, although there are some caveats. The main one is that the game itself is extremely rare – copies of the game do exist on the internet, but they are far from accurate and crash after the first few levels, and it seems as though a bona-fide retail copy of the game is still yet to be dumped onto the internet. There's a lot of mystery surrounding this obscure game, and no one seems to know where it was even released – however, what can be seen by most people is still a game that's worth playing. Hopefully someone will be able to find a proper version of this game soon and give it the respect that it deserves.





» [Atari ST] Somehow, these balloons magically drop a rock onto your cranium when you pass under them. Just another painful day at the office.



» [Atari ST] These creatures are another foe that Son Shu Si will have to take care of, despite his stance on animal cruelty.

RETRO STINKER

» OUTRUN

■ DEVELOPER: US GOLD ■ YEAR: 1988

■ Dogged as an 'ST port' by Amiga users, which misses out one thing – ST users by and large despised this botch job too. A thoroughly unfortunate treatment of a classic that should be avoided.



» TONIC TILE

■ DEVELOPER: THE EDGE
■ YEAR: 1988

■ It seems like every computer has their version of *Arkanoid* that's as good if not better than the original's port on said system – the Spectrum's *Batty* is a good example of this, and *Tonic Tile* fits the bill on the Atari ST. It's an obscure release that delivers a decent slice of bat-and-ball action, with the usual power ups included. The game's mouse controls are just right for sensitivity, and it moves fast, if a little choppy. Not bad at all.



» HEROQUEST

■ DEVELOPER: GREMLIN
■ YEAR: 1991

■ A must for all those kids who had the board game and enjoyed many an adventure to Barak Tor back in the day, *HeroQuest* is a fine and accurate conversion of the game complete with all of the original quests. The Amiga and Atari ST versions of this game are pretty much exactly the same as each other, but the ST has the bonus of including that lovely AY synth music from the Speccy version, outshining the Amiga this time around.



» KILLERBALL

■ DEVELOPER: MICROIDS
■ YEAR: 1991

■ The future sport genre wouldn't exist without the classic Seventies film *Rollerball*, in which James Caan and company skated around a track in pursuit of the opponent's goal. While the likes of *Speedball 2* are a lot more famous and perhaps better, *Killerball* is as close as you'll get to playing a future sports game based exactly on *Rollerball*, complete with lots of highly necessary roughness. An interesting addition to the genre.



» SKYRIDER

■ DEVELOPER: DIAMOND GAMES
■ YEAR: 1988

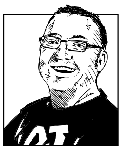
■ It's pretty clear that *Skyrider* takes more than a few notes from the pages of Hewson's classic *Uridium* – it's all about short levels where you fly at high speed over a base, with plenty of enemies to kill and objects to avoid while you take out as much of the ground as you can. Derivative though it may be, *Skyrider* is a good stab at the game, a neat little budget effort that'll certainly hold your attention for a little bit.



Super Hang On

MORE THAN JUST A BOG-STANDARD RACING GAME

RETROREVIVAL



» **MEGA DRIVE** » **1989** » **SEGA**

One of the best things about being a Mega Drive owner in its early years was having access to an amazing array of arcade conversions. Admittedly, they weren't quite as arcade perfect as we'd tell our friends, but they were typically of a very high quality compared to their home computer alternatives and I lapped them up.

In many cases, they were even better than their arcade parents, because while they were usually aesthetically inferior, they often had all sorts of cool extras that made them stand apart from the original game. *E-Swat* and *Shadow Dancer* were totally redesigned from the ground up, while the likes of *Golden Axe* featured an additional stage that was exclusive to the console. One such example of a game with extras that went beyond the call of duty was Sega's excellent conversion of *Super Hang On*, which came with a brand-new game mode.

While it was entirely possible to play a surprisingly authentic version of the original arcade game, Sega also included an excellent extra called 'Original Mode' which let you start off with an absolutely awful bike and then use your winnings from races to slowly upgrade it with various new parts. As you'd expect, those early races can be quite tough, particularly if you want to beat your AI rival into the asphalt, but as you slowly build up your reputation you earn more and more cash, which you can put towards better parts. It's a neat system that felt surprisingly comprehensive back in 1989, although it's nowhere near as in-depth as the home computer racing simulators that were available at the time. Sponsors could be attracted to help you bring in more cash to upgrade your bike, while crashing impacted negatively on you because now you were buying replacement parts instead of simply losing precious time like in 'Arcade' mode.

Needless to say I was pretty satisfied with *Super Hang On*, as that career mode offered some much-needed longevity, making it far easier to justify the expensive £40 price tag to myself when I purchased it from the Video Game Centre. The fact it can now be purchased for under a fiver is mind-boggling. *



THE HISTORY OF

MEDAL OF HONOR

The tale of the first-person shooter is a long and storied one, but Medal Of Honor deserves its own chapter. Adam Barnes recalls the history of a franchise that created the FPS that we know today

There's a sort of bittersweet irony to the life of *Medal Of Honor*. There's no denying the impact it had on the industry, not only did it turn the first-person shooter on its head and popularise the World War II setting across a spectrum of titles, but it also gave the PlayStation a leg up in a genre that was only really at home on PC. But consider it now: the franchise is all but dead after Electronic Arts eventually slowed it to a halt, the brand unable to fend off the competition that it had helped to spawn. Let's admit it, retro fans are no strangers to witnessing famed and reputed franchises fall by the wayside, but rare are the times when it is hubris that sees the fall of a beloved series. And yet it all started so well.

The original came out of nowhere, really. The PlayStation had recently launched and was starting to make waves, and DreamWorks Interactive was looking to garner some success in the industry. Like so many videogame tangents of film companies at the time, there was excitement and eagerness to utilise its silver screen brands for interactive entertainment. And it was here where *Medal Of Honor* began, when famed director Steven Spielberg directed a project away from its original design. The team working on *Jurassic Park 2* for the PlayStation took him the early prototype, only to find the director – and cofounder of DreamWorks Interactive – underwhelmed by the idea. "I was working at DreamWorks Interactive at the time," says Chris Cross, lead designer on the original *Medal Of Honor* and six titles that followed thereafter. "I had just finished a couple of kids titles on PC, first, and then I floated a little. I worked on *Trespasser*, to help get that out of the door and when that was done the lead designer on what at that time was the *very* beginning – like two milestones in – of what would be *Medal Of Honor* was like, 'Ah, I'm not really into this.' And there's a little story behind that, they went to show Steven Spielberg – because he was still active at DreamWorks Interactive at the time. They went to go show him *Jurassic Park 2* for PlayStation and he was like, 'Ugh… *Jurassic Park*, that's a dead licence. I'm doing this movie called *Saving Private Ryan*. World War II is gonna get hot. You guys should do *GoldenEye World War II*'."

According to Chris, Spielberg was big into gaming at the time, he and his young son Max bonding over the burgeoning and exciting entertainment. Even more than that, he was



» [PlayStation] A lot of effort was put into mixing up the pace, but *Medal Of Honor* still allowed for a variety of play styles.





» [PlayStation] Since the PlayStation didn't come with dual-stick controllers, a *GoldenEye*-style aiming setup needed to be implemented.

intrigued by the medium's interactive storytelling, and sought to bring the world of cinematography into videogames. With the release of *GoldenEye* on N64 – arguably the first truly 'console' first-person shooter – Spielberg was inspired into seeing the creation of something similar, with a setting that he could predict was going to become popular. "And I think somebody actually asked him, do you want to make it a *Saving Private Ryan* game? And he goes, 'No, because that's not the right thing for gaming, you guys need to come up with your own story. Making it World War II, and make it as good as *GoldenEye*.'"

And so the team set off trying to create just that, a console shooter that could hold a candle to Rare's incredibly successful *GoldenEye*, on a console built for 3D that few developers had yet been able to crack. "So the team went back and they started messing around with how to actually do that on a PlayStation. In three months they kind of figured out how to do it, but in that exploration the original lead designer left. He wasn't the right guy to do, he was a very heavy PC guy, he wanted to make it into a *Doom*, *Quake*, *Wolfenstein 3D* kind of thing." At this point, Chris was brought in as the lead designer, looking to create something that could achieve those lofty goals. And Chris had his own way of approaching such a project, believing it was about making a game that felt true to a historic setting. This wasn't supposed to be a game about killing monsters or propelling rockets into the face of a mecha-nazi, this needed to be a more slow-paced, methodical way of playing. ▶

★ KEY REAL-LIFE MISSIONS

How Medal Of Honor recreated these vital World War II battles

OPERATION: MARKET GARDEN



HOW IT REALLY HAPPENED: This was the largest air operation up until that point, with the airborne 'Market' forces seizing bridges between Eindhoven and Nijmegen and the ground 'Garden' forces assisting.

HOW IT WAS RECREATED: Lieutenant Jimmy Patterson travels with his squad to and through Arnhem to reach Arnhem Bridge so they can assist the Allied forces desperately trying to hold on to the strategic point.

ATTACK ON PEARL HARBOR



HOW IT REALLY HAPPENED: Japanese forces launched a surprise military operation against the American naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Though the assault is famed for its kamikaze pilots, in truth, though, there were very limited examples of this.

HOW IT WAS RECREATED: Corporal Joseph Griffin wakes to the attack on board the USS California, begins gunning down several Japanese planes before being knocked from the ship. He later helps the USS Nevada escape the harbour.

HEAVY WATER PLANT SABOTAGE



HOW IT REALLY HAPPENED: The Norwegian power plant at Rjukan secretly transported its heavy water (which could be used to create nuclear weapons) to France while Norwegian saboteurs destroyed the facilities to prevent the creation of any more.

HOW IT WAS RECREATED: Jimmy infiltrates the plant, disrupts its ability to produce electricity, destroys the research and flushes out the heavy water before disabling the base's transport.

BATTLE OF THE BULGE



HOW IT REALLY HAPPENED: This was the last major German offensive of WWII, intended to take control of the port city of Antwerp to gain the upper hand in peace treaty negotiations.

HOW IT WAS RECREATED: Lieutenant William Holt assists the 101st Airborne in the battle at the Ardennes before moving to liberate key strategic points. Holt then infiltrates a farmhouse to rescue OSS agent and recurring *Medal Of Honor* character Manon Batiste.

D-DAY



HOW IT REALLY HAPPENED: The largest seaborne assault in history, this operation saw Allied forces approach five key Normandy beaches that had been occupied and fortified by the Germans. Over 24,000 soldiers landed on the shores via amphibious vehicles.

HOW IT WAS RECREATED: An opening cinematic has Jimmy Patterson riding a Higgins boat. After being knocked into the sea and with most of his squad killed or injured, Patterson single-handedly disables the German bunkers and liberates the trenches behind.



» [PlayStation] , *Underground* brought a lot of new elements into the design.



> “Memory was a very, very real consideration for building games on the PlayStation”
> Chris Cross

But first the task was to get the game running on the PlayStation, and there were a lot of shortcuts and workarounds that needed doing to get the 3D engine working. Whether that was limitations on the number of enemies that could be on the screen, the way the player’s weapons were modelled to minimise the memory usage or simply the way that the controls were mapped to the controller, there was a hell of a lot to consider just to get it to function at all. “Memory was a very, very real consideration for building games on the PlayStation,” recalls Chris. “A significant amount of the memory was taken up by background geometry and then probably the most significant after that was the enemy animations. We had some engineers and we had one guy who was essentially a down-to-the-metal engineer. He knew what all the chips did and how to write assembly code to access those chips correctly. In fact, if you load *Medal Of Honor* on disc onto a PS3 with backwards compatibility, you can reach the end of the world where it doesn’t load because whatever instructions we were sending to initiate streaming off the disc at the time isn’t recognised by the newer machines. Sometimes it was spotty, you could go through the place where the trigger was and sometimes it would load and sometimes it wouldn’t. It was basically so highly optimised for the PlayStation that there was no guarantee that it was going to work on newer machines, it was specific for those machines, right?”

While the programmers and technical artists got to work with the engine, however, the rest of the team needed to devise a suitable means of combining the spy-based antics of James Bond with a World War II setting, and as they explored options the route they should take became increasingly clear. “We were going to make an OSS agent and put him on secret missions behind enemy lines,” says Chris, “which is still on top of the main running theme, a *Goldeneye World War II*, right? And so we took that and it ended up becoming such an interesting subject matter. The Offices Of Strategic Services was a really interesting thing at that time, so we dove really deep into the history of that, and we dove really deep into the historical battles around World War II and then we found ways to insert plausible deniability on the idea that there

★ ICONIC ARMS

The weaponry used to achieve victory for the Allied forces



M1911A1

■ No first-person shooter is complete without a basic pistol, typically the one you’ll start the game with. In this case it’s the M1911A1, the most popular sidearm in World War II games. Across the spectrum of games it was often the gun you started the game with, before escalating to some of the more powerful tools of destruction.



M1 GARAND

■ Easily the most iconic weapon of World War II and, by association, the *Medal Of Honor* series. The recognisable ‘ping’ that the weapon made as it ejected an empty shell from the barrel of the gun was replicated with great care by recording the sounds of a real-life M1 Garand striking a sack of meat.



MP 40

■ Despite being long since out of production, the MP 40 remains one of the most popular submachine guns in history and is a regular appearance FPS games – even those set in a contemporary era – thanks to its familiar shape. This was a favourite of the Axis forces in WWII, and is regularly collected from the corpses of enemies in the games.



M1912

■ Shotguns weren’t quite as varied as they are these days, and the M1912 shotgun was only really used in close-quarters combat, such as that of the various trenches of World War II, hence its ‘Trench Gun’ nickname. In *Medal Of Honor* it is typical the most powerful gun in the game, though its spread naturally makes it tougher to use effectively.

was a secret agent there at the time." This meant the most exciting or intriguing events of World War II could become their own missions for the game, and since they were played as disparate sequences – almost like interactive recreations from the dossiers sat in the war room – there was no need to confuse matters with the truth. Lieutenant Jimmy Patterson could have been at any of these famous WWII events.

The result of this was a finely tuned title that drew on a fantasy that few gamers had been given the opportunity to discover so thoroughly, and so when *Medal Of Honor* launched it 1999 it didn't take much for it to become a flyaway success. Chris explains that while the team could never have predicted the popularity, they were at least aware that it was "going to be different". The release was praised for its graphics, the well-rounded combat mechanics, the compelling setting and its varied pace and playstyles. But more than that, it was a booming commercial success, too, going on to sell over 2 million copies worldwide. With Electronic Arts as the publisher behind this new franchise, a sequel was inevitable. But rather than continue on with the original's Lieutenant Jimmy Patterson, the team saw an opportunity to utilise a protagonist from the original, casting off the shackles of the trope of the American saviour and instead opting for something a little more closer to home: French resistance fighter Manon Batiste, a character that had originally been designed around famed real-world OSS member Hélène Deschamps Adams. Chris described the release as "a short expansion project", and yet while it didn't change the formula at all it did at least give players an opportunity to take control of the intriguing character that had been previously introduced, have her backstory fleshed out a little more and take on some of war-torn Europe's more exotic locales. And, like most big name console titles of the time, there was an obligatory and half-assed Game Boy Advance release, too, a game that was left to dwell in history as much as its subject matter.

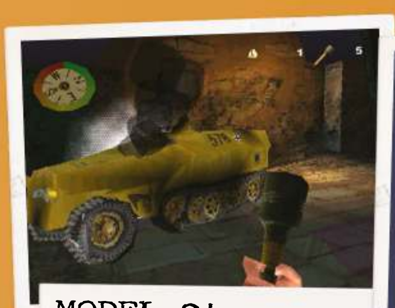
But this wasn't the only sequel in the works. *Medal Of Honor* had been a roaring success, but this at a time where PC gaming was still the primary platform for shooters, when the likes of *Doom* and *Wolfenstein* had been born on PC hardware and were still the de facto shooter experience. EA still wanted to focus some of its efforts into this market, and yet *Medal Of Honor* had been so specifically coded for the PlayStation; it wouldn't be such an easy task to convert to keyboard. Chris was in charge of this project too, though he admits he was mostly hands-off when it came to this platform. "That really came down to, 'Look: I don't make PC games, here are the pillars of the game and the essence of the project – see you later. Cause I'm not gonna tell you guys ▶



» [GBA] Rather than try and emulate the first-person success of the home console games, Netherock Ltd turned *Infiltrator* into a superb *Commando* clone.



» [PS2] The street-to-street fighting in Arnhem was another memorable level of *Frontline*'s, impeccably designed to allow for intense combat.



MODEL 24 STIELHANDGRANATE

■ It was the Mk II grenade that we know and recognise to this day that became the de facto hand grenade for modern militaries, which is what makes the German Model 24 such an intriguing weapon in the *Medal Of Honor* series. Its unique stick shape makes it something of a novelty to eyes that are so familiar with the egg shape of the Mk II.



M9A1 BAZOOKA

■ No FPS would be without a bazooka at some point, and while *Medal Of Honor* typically offers up both the Allied and Axis versions – the latter being the Panzerschreck – it is the familiar curved end of the Allied M9A1 that stands out the most. If you see one of these in-game, expect to also see a tank soon after.



M1918 BROWNING AUTOMATIC RIFLE

■ The series typically included US weaponry since they were the strongest option during World War II. While rare inclusions like the British Lee-Enfield rifle were exciting for us European gamers, the Browning Automatic Rifle – more commonly seen in the game as BAR – is easily one of the more thrilling choices due to its huge clip capacity.



» [PSP] *Heroes* took you across a number of locations, including Italy, the Netherlands and Belgium.



how to make a PC game. You need to own what you're making, it's all you.' But it was nice because I always got first consultant. I watched over the franchise for seven titles, seven years, something like that." The third game in the series in only three years – *Medal Of Honor : Allied Assault* – was released in 2002 on PC, and despite the favourable attention it drew, the game – and its 32-person multiplayer component – was mostly overlooked and left in obscurity.

What was surprising, however, was the suddenness with which EA sought to capitalise on the success of the original. Chris explains that at the same time that development begun on *Medal Of Honor: Underground*, work on what would be the first PS2 outing for the franchise started at the same time. "We took a full two years for that and the first nine months were really frustrating," he recalls. "I got into it with the executives at the time, and they were frustrated with our lack of progress. I threw the gauntlet down and said, 'Fuck you guys, it's gonna be good in January, come back in January.' Needless to say we were late for that milestone anyway, but the progress could be seen, right? I got real hot under the collar."

Now if you've had any experience with the *Medal Of Honor* franchise, it's a safe call to suggest that it was the fourth game in the series that you remember the most. If not for its highly enhanced graphics and improved gameplay, then at least for *that* opening segment. But the D-Day landing stage was never intended to be part of the game at all, explains Chris, and that it was only because the developers of the PC game – *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault* – had done so prior that its inclusion had been considered at all. "We originally didn't plan a D-Day level for *Frontline*," he admits. "That was an *Allied Assault* PC feature: they did that first, and what ended up happening was that they basically mimicked *Saving Private Ryan* shot for shot and put it into the Unreal Engine. They went and they did a demo for Steven [Spielberg] on the set of *Saving Private Ryan*, and he was like: 'Oh my god, this is the most amazing thing I've ever seen!' It was so powerful at the time to be able to play that, and what ended up happening was that we were like, 'Shit, we've got to put that into the console product.'"

But that wasn't such a simple decision. The game itself had been in production for months already, and was mostly set in stone as to what levels and features would be included. "We had always avoided D-Day because that's a potential memory hog. On PC they had way different memory constraints, a different approach to building things and so building D-Day for them was relatively trivial. We had to bring in a separate producer, another two designers to tack it on in the last half of the project." But it was worthwhile. If there's one thing anyone recalls about the *Medal Of Honor* series it's *Frontline*'s D-Day opening cinematic and the ensuing gameplay. The game itself featured so many great, compelling moments, the improved visuals were some of the best on PS2 at the time and the continuing narrative – rather than a set of disparate missions – helped to draw that movie-like sensation out of those that played it, but none of that mattered. The D-Day landing, however much of a carbon copy of the same scene from *Saving Private Ryan* it was, left such a powerful impression on anyone that played it. Videogames had, up until that point, struggled to represent that same, Spielberg-esque quality; this was a

★ TIMELINE

MEDAL OF HONOR
1999, PLAYSTATION

MEDAL OF HONOR: UNDERGROUND
2000, PLAYSTATION/GBA

MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT
2002, PC

MEDAL OF HONOR: FRONTLINE
2002, VARIOUS

MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN
2003, VARIOUS

MEDAL OF HONOR: INFILTRATOR
2003, GBA

MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT
2004, PC

MEDAL OF HONOR: EUROPEAN ASSAULT
2005, VARIOUS

MEDAL OF HONOR: HEROES
2006, PSP

MEDAL OF HONOR: VANGUARD
2007, PLAYSTATION 2/WII

MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE
2007, VARIOUS

MEDAL OF HONOR: HEROES 2
2007, PSP/WII

MEDAL OF HONOR
2010, VARIOUS

MEDAL OF HONOR: WARFIGHTER
2012, VARIOUS



» [PS2] *Rising Sun* showed off the Pacific side of World War II.

★ THE LOCALES OF WORLD WAR II



★ THE SPIELBERG TOUCH

How the Hollywood director made his mark on the series

According to Chris Cross, much of Steven Spielberg's input into *Medal Of Honor* was advisory. Rather than directly controlling the project and ensuring certain elements would get implemented, he would instead make irregular visits into the development offices – which was intentionally located off the highway on the way to his studio at DreamWorks – to catch up on the work of not only the *Medal Of Honor* team but the rest of the projects at DreamWorks Interactive.

For the original, many of his suggestions were more creative, filmic additions. For example, Spielberg would offer up places where explosive barrels should be placed for a easy – and thrilling – kill on a larger group of enemies. He also suggested points where enemies ought to appear, or the placement of stationary gun turrets for moments of excitement to help control the pace of the level. Chris also adds that he offered more broader reaching suggestions, too, but that many of them would have proven to be too difficult to implement with the hardware at the time.

But Spielberg's biggest input into the series was with the development of *Frontline*. After 2015 Inc had showed him their demo of the Normandy beach landings in *Allied Assault* – which was taken shot-for-shot from Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* – he became enamoured with the idea of playing the same moment interactively. Spielberg guided the cinematography of the final product, while also suggesting to the console team working on *Frontline* that they should also add the D-Day landings to the game, specifically making it the opening section. Despite the project already well on the way to completion, Spielberg's input took interest from EA executives who then ensured that the segment would be added, bringing that famed cinematic moment to gamers.





» [PSP] Despite being a commendable shooter on a weaker platform, *Heroes 2* struggled to find a suitable audience on Sony's handheld..

> **"We had been taken over by the EA machine, and there was a huge downslope at that point"**
> Chris Cross



» [PS2] *Vanguard* was mostly forgotten thanks to the switch to the 'PS360' generation, but it didn't help that interest in WWII shooters had decreased dramatically.

▶ defining moment not only for the franchise, but the industry as a wider whole. "In hindsight, it was the right thing to do," says Chris, who wasn't quite so happy at the time, "but I fought it the whole way. It was the right choice to put first because it was so impactful and so memorable, and it sets up the fantasy of World War II so strongly in the player's brain, kind of like that action scene in the beginning of a movie. It's the first thing to set everything up. I'm so happy that we did it, but at the time when you're really close to a product you fight everything."

***Frontline* released on PS2 in mid-2002, months after its earlier PC counterpart had already launched, and is still undeniably the high point for the franchise.** The combination of the game's cinematic quality and its rich flowing story – which, says Chris, was intended to essentially be *A Bridge Too Far* – with intense street-to-street fighting and an excellent use of the historic setting really raised the title above its competitors, a facet that *Medal Of Honor* was soon going to have to contend with. The game went on to sell well over 6 million copies on PS2 alone, with a further 2 million across its Xbox and GameCube versions and is, to this day, the highest selling entry of the series. But trouble was brewing, and the clash between the historic shooters had only just begun to heat up; this was an early victory for EA and DreamWorks Interactive in a war that they would ultimately be unable to fight. The first assault would, ironically, come from EA itself, when it teamed up with then-relatively unknown developer DICE to release the first entry in the *Battlefield* series in September 2002. Utilising the World War II setting and focusing on a large-scale multiplayer mode, as had been the case with *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*, *Battlefield 1942* quickly built up a following that would one day work to undo a lot of the recognition that the *Medal Of Honor* franchise had been building. But it wasn't until 2003, with the release of the first *Call Of Duty*, that *Medal Of Honor*'s demise began in earnest. Activision's first competitor in the World War II shooter market leveraged a greater sense of spectacle than *Medal Of Honor* had been known for – even after the release of *Frontline* – and before long the series would struggle to keep up with the escalating thrills that *COD* would offer.

But before all that, EA was riding high on the success of *Frontline*. Two expansions to the PC title were released – one in 2002 and one in 2003 – while the team behind *Frontline* then utilised the same engine to quickly release *Rising Sun*, moving away from war torn Europe for the first time into the battles of the Pacific. Courtesy of the series'





» [PS3] Tackling a more contemporary war was the right move for 2010's *MOH*, but it struggled to compete in a market engulfed by *Call Of Duty*.



» [PC] The later *Medal Of Honor* games, like *Warfighter*, failed to reach the success of modern *COD* instalments.

fame the title still managed to garner a great deal of commercial success, but critics weren't quite as drawn in as the classic film-inspired *Frontline*. It'd be easy to accredit this to a fatigue with the genre already – a fact that would only become exacerbated in the years that followed – but in truth, the team behind *Frontline* just wasn't the same. "I moved on to *Rising Sun*, and that was originally meant to be a two-game series but by that point in time, I'd had enough," says Chris. "The team from *Frontline* went to start Spark Unlimited, after *Allied Assault* the team from 2015 Inc went to start Infinity Ward, *Call Of Duty* started to encroach, you know, we lost our way on that. I worked on *European Assault* also, but I was having extreme burnout. We had been taken over by the EA machine, and there was a huge downslope at that point."

R*ising Sun* was released on PS2, Xbox and GameCube in 2003, followed by *Infiltrator*, a surprisingly good GBA game in late 2003 in time for the Christmas purchases. Each year saw the release of a new *Medal Of Honor* game, and alongside it Activision would release its own *Call Of Duty*, continuing to chip away at the respect that *Medal Of Honor* had stockpiled. "The beginning of the Noughties for me, it was like the end of the end, you know what I mean?" ponders Chris. "I was unwilling to play the politics of EA and become an executive producer, because I wanted to always stay as a game designer. I don't regret that, but there is an alternative reality where I say, 'Okay, I'll be the EP, give me the franchise.' Which was the power move, and I'm glad I didn't, but that would have been the only way to keep the integrity of the franchise – to fight those battles on my own rather than leaning in on my executive producer."

Medal Of Honor: Pacific Assault released for PC in 2004, recreating many of the events of *Rising Sun* for the non-console crowd. This was followed by a new partnership with Sony to release the PSP game *Medal Of Honor: Heroes* in 2006, a title that was sadly aligned with a handheld that was poorly equipped to house it. Then there was the last ditch attempt on PS2 to regain interest in the franchise with 2007's *Vanguard* on PS2 and Wii – but the damage was already done. It was enough that *Call Of Duty* had been climbing the charts with its own releases, but after every other major developer in the industry had already been trying its hand at World War II, interest in the setting was at an all time low – so much so that even now the idea of a new WWII shooter is met mostly with derision. The nail in the coffin truly came in 2007: a three platform assault from EA had *Vanguard* on PS2, a *Heroes* sequel on PSP and *Airborne* on PS3 that saw players take part in some of World War II's most iconic battles. But at a time when interest in World War II FPS games was at its lowest, 2007 saw something far more compelling to the shooter fan: *Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*, a name whose significance needs no explanation. *Medal Of Honor* was dead and EA knew it, changing instead focus on its *Battlefield* franchise.

But that wasn't quite the end, EA gave the ailing franchise one last chance. In 2010, the publisher made quite a show about its rebooting of the series. A joint effort between Danger Close Games on single-player and DICE – considered to be the multiplayer experts – the franchise finally cut ties with World War II and, instead, focused on a more contemporary battle in the Middle East. It was brave, and continued the sobriety and respect for soldiers that the series had, if nothing else, maintained over the years. But it was too late: *Call Of Duty* had exploded and it seemed nothing could be done to dislodge reigning champion. The name that had once set in motion a the creation of the military shooter genre had been beaten, and to add insult to injury was even termed a '*Call Of Duty* clone'. A hurried sequel – *Medal Of Honor: Warfighter* – didn't do anything to counteract the poor commercial reception of the reboot, leading to EA all but confirming that the *Medal Of Honor* brand was to be resigned to the history books. And there it lies: much like the famed soldiers of the war the series was most known for covering, it is best remembered as the valiant hero of a very difficult battle it simply could not have won. ✱

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO…

GAMES THAT NEVER SAW THE LIGHT OF DAY



DRAGON SWORD

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:**
MGM Interactive

» **DEVELOPER:**
Interactive Studios (Team Storm)

» **SYSTEM:**
Nintendo 64

» **DUE FOR RELEASE:**
December 1999



Dragon Sword was set to be an exciting action game for the Nintendo 64 but it never saw the light of day. Philip Oliver reveals what led to its cancellation

Creating videogames is a tough business – it's filled with winners and losers. For every triple-A game that receives critical acclaim and sales, there are countless others that simply fail to leave a mark on us. Worse yet, there are many games that don't get off the starting line. Some are cancelled early when it's clear they're not going anywhere, but others get canned when they're literally ready for release. *Dragon Sword* was one such game…

"We were big fans of *Gauntlet* and loved creating fantasy words with medieval-style characters and locations," reveals Philip Oliver about the origins of his team's missing N64 game. "With the advent of consoles being able to do 3D graphics we felt that players would love to control a warrior in a richly detailed close-combat action adventure 3D world, [this] was in 1997. Nintendo was the dominant console manufacturer, although Sony was rising fast. Like most good developers, we had PlayStation development kits, but that also meant a lot of competition. Having won the contract for *Glover* on N64, we had several N64 [Dolphin] development kits and we had to create a good 3D engine and we knew Nintendo would market the console well. With other developers not being able to get dev N64 kits, we figured we were in a good position to make another great game on this console." It was a sound plan and the team got to work on its game (then known as *Dragon Storm*). The team started off with just four people, but as development ramped up there were 14 people working on *Dragon Sword* after eight months of development. The game was due to master for December 1998 and there were also options with publisher MGM to have versions for the PlayStation and PC as well. *Dragon Sword* would end up being in production for around 20 months, which is a long period for a release from around that time, but nowhere near the 12-year gestation period that has been bandied around the internet.

That development time was fraught with difficulty, too, because the team were facing numerous issues due to the software they were using to make *Dragon Sword*. "The 3D engine and tools were the greatest challenge," admits Philip. "We choose not to use the Silicon Graphics suite that Nintendo and Rare were using, because they were so expensive. We'd starting working



Members of the Dragon Sword team pose with Philip and Andrew Oliver.

OR YOU COULD PLAY...

GAUNTLET LEGENDS
1999, MIDWAY GAMES

■ Midway's port of Atari Games' four-player arcade game worked exceptionally well on the N64. It retains all the elements of the arcade original, meaning you could team up with three friends and take on the dark forces with a variety of powerful heroes.



DIABLO
1996, BLIZZARD

■ It's unclear if *Diablo* had any influence on *Dragon Sword*, but its hack-and-slash elements and heavy RPG mechanics certainly share many parallels with the cancelled game. While it still holds up well today, we would say to seek out the superior 1999 sequel.



BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE
2001, SNOWBLIND STUDIOS

■ *Dragon Sword* was hanging around release schedules as late as August 2001, meaning it would have been up against this superb ARPG from Snowblind Studios. It definitely benefits from being released in the PS2 generation and was followed by an equally good sequel.



"Fundamentally Dragon Sword was a great game, but on the wrong platform"

with 3D Studio Max on PlayStation, so our artists were used to this and we'd already created a 3D engine. The 64-bit floating-point main processor on the Nintendo 64 was very different to the PlayStation. The biggest problem was actually the vastly reduced number of polygons the Nintendo could display, compared to the PlayStation, but they were better quality, not suffering from warping, jiggling and texture distortion."

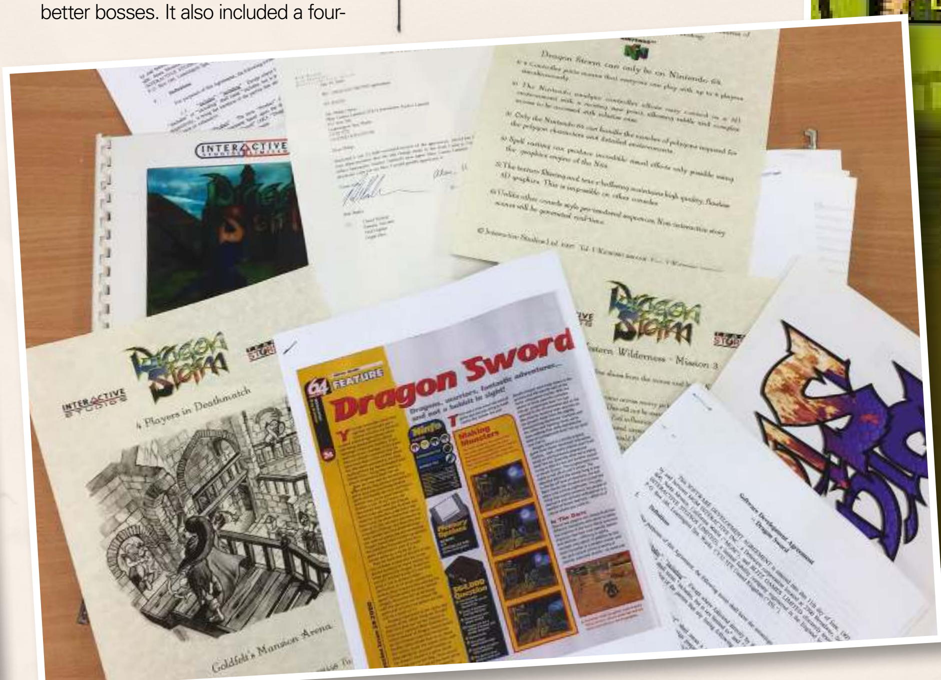
The team battled on, though, creating a solid 3D brawler that catered for co-op play and saw you seeking out the fabled *Dragon Sword* after escaping from a dungeon during the game's intro. Like *Gauntlet Legends*, *Dragon Sword* had you smashing generators to stop them from spawning monsters; various items that could be picked up to enhance your warrior and diverse fantasy backdrops to battle through. While its co-operative mode only catered for two players, it mixed things up by including characters that were distinctly different to control, various areas that couldn't be assessed until you found the right switch and far better bosses. It also included a four-player deathmatch arena mode and had destructible objects. Everything was going well, but then disaster struck and MGM Interactive (which had already published the studio's previous game, *Wargames*) got cold feet and *Dragon Sword* was pulled from the release schedule. "Things had gone relatively well with [MGM] on the PlayStation and PC [with] *Wargames*, and they wanted a game on the N64," reveals Philip. "But, they were struggling to make money as a full corporation and their games division wasn't bringing in enough money. Like other film companies [Disney, Universal, DreamWorks, Time Warner etc] they were hoping to capitalise on their film franchises, but wanted to see if they could also create some original titles. But, towards the end of development, MGM Interactive was being closed down and it's assets sold to Electronic Art."

It was a bitter blow to the team, particularly as the game had been going out for reviews and had received an impressive 93% from *64 Magazine*, which then started a petition to try and get the game published. "It was frustrating," recalls Philip who mentions that Nintendo's platform was struggling due to the cost of cartridges. Something that would have been of huge concern to the cost-conscious MGM. "Maybe we could have ported it to PlayStation and PC, but MGM owned the title and MGM Interactive was being sold to EA who did not want to support the N64 due to the expensive cartridge costs and they had little interest in *Dragon Sword*. Their main reason for purchasing MGM Interactive was for the *James Bond* licence."

Despite *Dragon Sword* never getting a release many have now played the game as a ROM exists for it online, something that Philip is aware of. "The game was close to being finished and many review and testing cartridges were made," he explains. "We also had quite a few Nintendo cartridges with EPROM chips of the game, and people would borrow these to play, as they were fun. It's easy to copy these, with the right equipment. Clearly someone uploaded the ROM to the internet and it spread." That distribution has now enabled people to discover *Dragon Sword* for themselves, with many comments on the likes of unseen64.net suggesting there would have been a decent market for the game had it been released. "Fundamentally *Dragon Sword* was a great game, but on the wrong platform," concludes Philip. "It goes to show that success in the games industry, is not just about writing a great game. You need to have a great game, on the right platforms, at the right price with positive reviews and customers excited to spend money." *







A lot of effort went in to Dragon Sword, it's a pity it never received a release.



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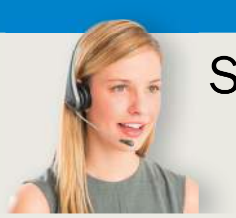
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CALL of CTHULHU
Dark Corners of the Earth

"I do not expect the reader to believe what I am about to relate. Any sane mind must reject such a fantastic tale. And yet I do not know which would be worse: for my story to be the truth, or for my mind to be capable of imagining such things"

Despite renowned horror writer HP Lovecraft having authored some of the most haunting stories of the 20th century, his works remain noticeably unfulfilled in videogames, despite inspiration evident in games such as the *Alone In The Dark* series. By the late Nineties, none had placed themselves within a recognisable world based directly on Lovecraft's writings until *Call Of Cthulhu: Dark Corners Of The Earth*, the story of private investigator Jack Walters. After a dramatic prelude in which Walters encounters arcane horrors that send him straight to the Arkham Asylum For The Insane, the detective apparently recovers, and finds himself once more behind his desk, investigating the disappearance of grocery store clerk Brian Burnham from the Massachusetts town of Innsmouth. Getting to Innsmouth is easy; getting out, and with your skin intact, is a different matter.



In The Know...
- **» PUBLISHER:** BETHESDA
- **» DEVELOPER:** HEADFIRST PRODUCTIONS
- **» RELEASED:** 2005
- **» GENRE:** SURVIVAL HORROR
- **» PLATFORM:** XBOX, PC

Dark Corners began life in that most Nineties of phenomenon, the internet chat room. Within the group known as alt.horror.cthulhu, Andrew Brazier of Headfirst Productions, known primarily for *Simon The Sorcerer 3D*, posed the question: what would you want to see in a videogame of *Call Of Cthulhu*? The response from mythos fans was varied, but it would help shape the game into an accurate and fear-laden take on the famous horror writer. "Back then it was the easiest way to get in touch with dedicated fans," recalls Andrew, "And I learned very quickly that mythos had a large and passionate following. I got a lot of good suggestions regarding what should or shouldn't be in the game, and even some suggesting the very idea of a Lovecraft videogame was sacrilege." The challenge, Andrew continues, was to "make something that would interest Cthulhu fans, and also attract a new audience, plus ensuring the final game was actually fun to play". Headfirst's director, Mike Woodroffe negotiated a licence with Chaosium, owner of the *Call Of Cthulhu* RPG, giving the development team an influx of resources and updated source material. Extracting themes from Lovecraft's own work was necessary but problematic. "He never used one word when 50 would do!" laughs Andrew. "So one of the main jobs as far as the story was concerned, was condensing key events down into something that would make an exciting narrative." Lovecraft's story, *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, was the work that



» [PC] Jack's mission takes him to the ancient city of Y'ha-nthlei, deep below the Devil's Reef



» [PC] Jack works at this desk in an early cutscene.

How We Made Hotel Hell

We talk to designer Ed Kay and the others involved with Dark Corners' infamous escape scene

Ed Kay: I can't take all the credit for the idea, but when I came on board it had already gone through several iterations. I was given a partially broken, messily coded, fairly unfun level and had to get it finished, quickly. We could only have six enemies active at once and they are teleported around. We faked other stuff, too, unowned yelling voices, gunshots with no shooter, and so on. The whole level is smoke and mirrors. I think the build up to it is amazing, since it's previously about the atmosphere and the player isn't under any real threat. Then suddenly, you're awake in the middle of the night and it goes from 'take your time and explore' to 'run for your sodding life'!

Gareth Clarke: We wanted to terrify people and give them the sense that this wasn't like other games – to feel the pressure. Thing is, if you turn off the sound, it's not actually that hard. The voices, and music, got players stressed and panicky. It has an element of Simon Says about it but I really loved it, and the pressure it put you under. It was very clever.

Chris Gray: We knew that was going to be challenging to put together, especially as running away is such an unusual concept for players. Of all the sequences in the game it probably went through the most hands, and in all honesty, we were never entirely happy with it. However, I think it's a highly original chapter, and if you can forgive the frustrations, it's a wonderfully terrifying experience to play.

Ed Kay: Honestly, looking back, it was way too hard! With a little more experience and time, we'd have playtested it more and pulled the difficulty a bit.

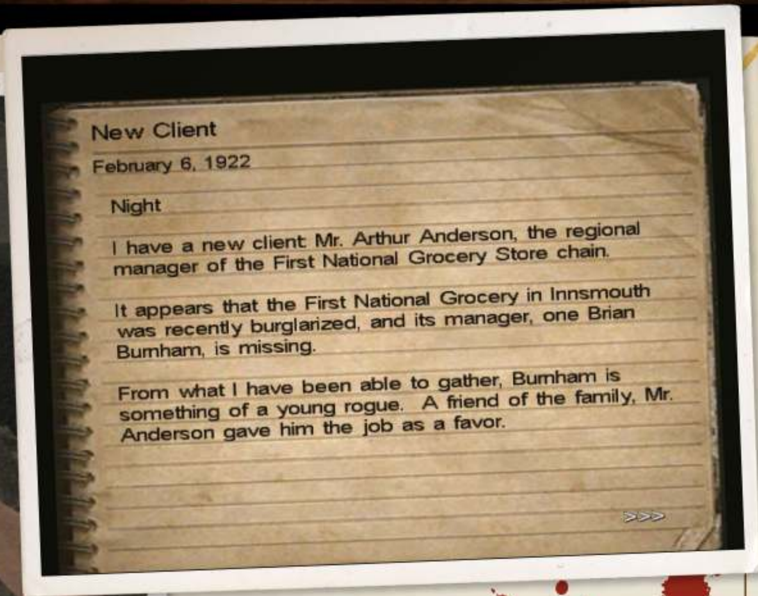
> *"[The challenge] was to make something that would interest Cthulhu fans, and also attract a new audience"*
>
> Andrew Brazier

Dark Corners was to be most closely based on. "The main reasons were the cool spooky setting, and that it gave us a tangible enemy type in the hybrids [grotesque half men/fish breeds] and Deep Ones." As Andrew observes, many Lovecraft stories contain creatures beyond comprehension, making tense reading, but an unhelpful basis for visual interpretation, despite the author's efforts at describing the 'indescribable'.

Innsmouth itself was an inspired choice for the majority of the game's setting; dark, foreboding, and full of hostile residents, the town's background in mythos made it a perfect location. "The driving force behind the game was initially [Headfirst Creative Director] Simon Woodroffe," explains Andrew. "He set out the original design and plans for what we were trying to achieve. When development started, I was involved with design and technical art – there were a number of problems that needed solving, most notable how we were going to deal with lighting in order to create the atmosphere we wanted."

Also working at Headfirst was designer Chris Gray. "I'd played plenty of role-playing games, and knew that Lovecraft was a pioneering author," recalls Chris, "but hadn't read the books. That said, I quickly became a fan, partly out of necessity, but mostly because the mythos is such a rich universe." Buoyed by ideas from the chat group, the template was a HUD-less stealth shooter complete with a sanity system and story-based structure. "I remember brainstorming meetings where those key concepts were established," continues Chris, "and the focus put on story, rather than shooting. It just felt like a natural direction to take the game." Coming on board at this point was programmer Gareth Clarke, sold on the concept enough to choose Headfirst over other employment options. "It was such a unique game design that it became the game I wanted to work on," he reveals. "It was a bit of a gamble because, apart from *Simon The Sorcerer*, there wasn't a lot of people that had heard of them." The same year (2000), the game's first publisher, Ravensburger, was secured and there followed a protracted period of negotiations as first it, then subsequent publisher Fishtank pulled out of the project. "It was an absolute nightmare, as always when you're mid-development," recalls Gareth painfully. "We were pushed towards the concept of a 'vertical slice' – creating a full set of functionality for a limited portion of the game, the demo." Until this point, Headfirst had been developing *Dark Corners* using the Netimmerse engine and an early version of the Havoc physics engine. Then called Telekinesys, in-game physics were a relatively new concept at the time. "They were doing some impressive stuff and needed a team to create demos to show off the technology," explains Andrew. Headfirst created a small section of a Cthulhu-themed game that demonstrated the fluid dynamics and ragdoll physics. A subsequent display at GDC in 2000 ensured the game received a lot of press, but there were drawbacks, as Gareth explains: "We were finding all sorts of issues with Havoc at the ▶





New Client

February 6, 1922

Night

I have a new client: Mr. Arthur Anderson, the regional manager of the First National Grocery Store chain.

It appears that the First National Grocery in Innsmouth was recently burglarized, and its manager, one Brian Burnham, is missing.

From what I have been able to gather, Burnham is something of a young rogue. A friend of the family, Mr. Anderson gave him the job as a favor.

» [PC] The mystery of Innsmouth begins…

time – no negativity towards it, but it was in its infancy and we just couldn't get it to do what we needed it to." It was a similar story with the Netimmerse game engine. "It wasn't robust in terms of a game engine, unless you were running at 60 frames a second," says Gareth, and when publisher Bethesda signed the game in 2003, and shifted the focus from PC to Xbox, it was clear the two middlewares would not be suitable. "By today's standards, 60 frames would be fine but on the original Xbox and PCs of the time you were looking at 30."

With a new publisher on board, but the extra challenge of in-house game and physics engines, development of *Dark Corners* began to slow with the increased workload on the small team. The first design and ideas had been scribbled down in 1999; now, in late 2003, Headfirst's exciting vision of the world of Lovecraft was as far away as ever. The team split into two as Simon Woodroffe focused on other projects, with Chris Gray assuming design and other responsibilities on *Dark Corners*. "It was my job to revise and edit the game to something shorter – the original plan had been 40 hours – and then add in all the detail and dialogue coordination with the rest of the design team." The team spent swathes of time ensuring the player felt suitably unwelcome in the poisoned town of Innsmouth, its inhabitants pausing to stare at Jack or confronting him directly with a rough, gargled warning. The sound design was intrinsic, too, with certain effects containing a specific radius so they would fade ghostlike as the player approached, or random crying behind doors and cellar windows that would reveal disturbing scenes if spied through.

Two key elements in fostering the atmosphere of *Dark Corners* were the HUD-less display and sanity meter. "The lack of a HUD came from the importance of immersing the player and making sure there were fewer distractions reminding you it was a videogame," Chris recalls. "This fed naturally into the sanity system; anything we planned on doing visually just felt like it was never going to be as effective if you had a bunch of elements on the screen." *Dark Corners*' sanity worked in the background, quietly logging instances of terror against periods of reassuring calm. "It was a resource, just like any other health resource," tells Gareth. "There were field-of-vision influences, so if you looked directly at a corpse it would degrade your sanity more effectively than if it was in your periphery." Should the player let Jack Walters encounter too many horrors, the screen would blur, Jack would see visions and mumble to himself. Persist in the behaviour and the character would take his own life, either by gun, or strangulation – a somewhat intense occurrence. "You were supposed to be able to manage the sanity," explains Gareth, "as we wanted players to

Developer Highlights

SIMON THE SORCERER 3D
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: 2002

DEADLANDS
SYSTEM: PC
YEAR: UNRELEASED

CALL OF CTHULHU: DESTINY'S END
SYSTEM: PC, PLAYSTATION 2, XBOX
YEAR: UNRELEASED

Defining Moments



Attack Of The Fishmen

■ Unarmed and alone, Jack is cornered in his dingy Innsmouth hotel room by a gang of tainted locals. *Dark Corners*' infamously frustrating scene is unlikely to be one you're going to complete first time, requiring practice and timing to elude the fishmen. But it's an exhilarating and intense experience nonetheless.

Dagon Attacks

■ Aboard the ship Urania, Jack and the crew must fend off a clutch of deep ones as they approach, Devil's Reef. Pounding the deck, their boss Dagon surfaces and Jack must avoid his attacks in between letting off shots from the ship's deck cannon. Clever effects give the impression of the boat moving, despite it not actually going anywhere throughout the level.





The Death Of Ramona Waite

■ Having been pointed in the direction of Thomas Waite in order to solve the mystery of Brian Burnham's disappearance, the hero accidentally releases a horrible creature resident in the attic of the Waite household – Mrs Waite herself, who proceeds to slaughter her own daughter as she escapes into the streets. Thomas Waite himself later commits suicide with the guilt – nice going, Jack.

> *"We proudly went to the nearest major videogame store the week of release and they didn't have any copies"*
>
> Chris Gray

experience it, but not so much that it ends the game."

With the switch of publisher, the Xbox became the primary platform with PC and PlayStation 2 versions to follow, the former lead version relegated to console-port status, as Bethesda also pressed Headfirst for a PlayStation 2 version. "We said, 'No chance,'" grimaces Gareth, "so they outsourced it. I recall an awkward conversation when the other developer phoned up and asked us questions on its feasibility. They'd tried everything, but it was clear it would never happen. It had half the memory again of the Xbox, so the tech was just hopelessly compromised." With the change from PC to Xbox, the game had already undergone many sacrifices, notably the removal of Jack's arms and optimisation of the game's ambitious levels.

Dark Corners Of The Earth was finally released in 2005. Bethesda, delighted by the runaway success of the third *Elder Scrolls* chapter, *Morrowind*, had already shifted focus to promoting its sequel. "We proudly went to the nearest major videogame store the week of release," recalls Chris painfully, "and they didn't have any copies. They hadn't even heard of it. That hurt given how much personal time we'd sacrificed." Even had *Dark Corners* been a runaway success, it was too late for Headfirst, crippled by the elongated development. "The PC version very nearly didn't happen," says Gareth, "as I was practically the only person left in the building, and hadn't been paid for months. But we couldn't stand it not coming out after years of work."

Ultimately, despite poor sales, and mixed reviews, *Dark Corners* remains a game its team are very proud of 12 years later. "The production values and polish may not have been great," says Chris, "but it was a labour of love for us, and there were a lot of original ideas on display – maybe too many. In a medium where journalists are screaming out for originality, it would have been nice to receive a bit more credit for trying something different." Gareth, who left for Midlands developer Eurocom after Headfirst collapsed, says, "It's without shadow of a doubt my favourite game I've worked on, because of the way the team gelled together and the original nature of it. No other game has had its longevity; every year I see it in lists of 'top ten games no one ever played' or 'great games for Halloween'. It's a bit of a curiosity, and in some respects I prefer that it was a commercial failure, yet a cult success, because it shaped my enthusiasm for the industry."

Bored of relentless shooting and so-called vulnerable heroes, tooled up to the max with automatic rifles and shotguns? Why not jump into the fragile skin of investigator Jack Walters and attempt to uncover the horrible secret of the town of Innsmouth? Just beware of your own mind, dear reader, should it recoil in terror at glimpsing those insidious, pervading, dark corners of the earth. *





The Prisoner Of Yith

■ *Dark Corners* wastes little time in establishing its horrors. In the basement of the dilapidated manor house of the game's intro, there's a truly sickening and bizarre sight. A poor victim, pinned to the wall, is being kept alive despite having all his major organs removed and stored in tanks around the room. This, and subsequent events of the intro conspire to put Jack into Arkham Asylum for several years.





An Unspeakable Horror

■ Having saved J Edgar, Jack encounters the first of several large Cthulhu creatures in the bug-eyed, slimy Shoggoth. It cannot be harmed directly and besides, staring at the monstrosity for too long will destroy Jack's sanity. Only by manipulating the valves and pipes around it can the Shoggoth be destroyed, but escape is temporary – its liquefied remains chase the investigator through the refinery's corridors. Eek.

Too Much Fear Will Kill You

■ Like much of *Dark Corners*' interactivity, there's no onscreen bar or statistic to help the player keep track of Jack's sanity. Visual cues, visions and his incoherent babbling are the clues you have, and ignore them at your peril. Eventually, overcome by his fears, Jack will take his own life by shooting himself or, as in this picture, strangling the life from his body with his own bare hands. Crikey.



Future Classic

Modern games you'll still be playing in years to come



Info

» **Featured System:** PC
» **Year:** 2016
» **Developer:** Playdead
» **Key People:** Arnt Jenson (director), Jeppe Carlson (design), Martin Stig Andersen (audio)

Go Deeper

» Composer Martin Stig Anderson routed Inside's audio through a real human skull to help achieve the sound he wanted for the game.

» Playdead's cofounder Dino Christian Patti left shortly after *Inside*'s release and founded new studio Jumpship.

64.



» [PC] *Inside* is beautiful in its own twisted way.

Explore the clever, creative, and expertly crafted puzzle platformer, built on its spiritual predecessor, and uncover why it deserves its classic status. Paul Walker-Emig takes you inside… Inside

INSIDE

THE BACKGROUND

Before *Inside*, there was *Limbo*. Known for its distinctive silhouette-like art style, some memorable arachnophobia-inducing moments, and its open-ended storytelling, it is a well-crafted puzzle platformer that received plenty of praise. Enough to ensure that there would be interest in whatever was to come next from the studio that created it.

The genesis for what would become *Inside* was a piece of concept art that depicted what we will only describe, to avoid spoilers, as 'the thing', created by Playdead artist Morten Bramsen. If you've played the game, you know what we're talking about. That piece of art ended up being the reference point for the entire game's visual style, the gravitational core for its structure, the revelatory pivot for the themes with which it plays.

Working back from that, Playdead managed to create a game with a rare artistic precision. The team knew where it was going, it knew what it wanted to achieve, and it tuned everything with that specific destination in mind.

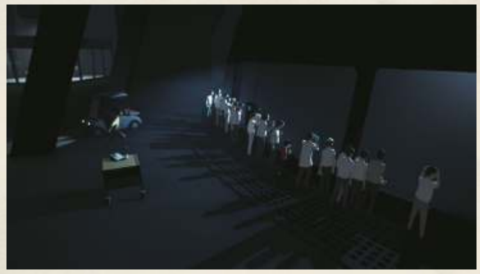
THE GAME

Inside starts in the same way as its spiritual predecessor. You take control of a young boy in a forest, without being given any context for where you are or what you are doing. You simply do what anyone would do with a controller in your hand and a character on a 2D plane on the screen in front of you. You move right.

You never hear a word of dialogue uttered in *Inside*, nor see a line of explanatory text appear on screen. Yet, almost instantly, the game starts telling you its story. You can spot the uneasiness in the boy's movements, hear the anxiety in his breathing. You know that all is not well. Soon, you find yourself running from masked men trying to hunt you down as you're introduced to a dystopian world that's defined by the crumbling architecture you move through, the people you see marching in unison below you and the puzzles you must solve to progress. *Inside* is masterful in the way it paints a picture of its world using only the language of games. It is the floorboards that break under your step, the terror you feel as



» [PC] *Inside* excels in creating haunting visuals that stay with you long after the credits roll.



» [PC] It's easy to understand why this scene was used in early trailers. You want to know what they are looking at!



> "You're always encountering something new, something interesting"



» [PC] The boy in *Inside* has a vulnerability that's reminiscent of *Limbo*.

a hand reaches for your ankle as you pull yourself up from the water's edge, the mind-controlling technology you use to manipulate braindead slaves slumped in cages that draw the contours of this dark world and offer an insight into the grotesquery and injustice that underpins it.

The way that *Inside* musters every element with military discipline – sound, animation, visuals, mechanics, pacing, and so on – to achieve its ends doesn't just apply to its storytelling. Every moment in this game is meticulously crafted. We think of the rabid barks of attack dogs bearing down on the young boy as he runs to safety. You hear his breathing quicken with exertion and fear as the snapping jaws come closer. Inevitably, you leap to safety at the last possible second, the game poised in such a way as to squeeze every last possible ounce of tension out of the encounter.

This is a game that makes the case for the value of design in a world where procedural generation is in fashion. It always has you in the palm of its hand, always has you where it wants, and does so without feeling contrived. Perhaps you're uncomfortable with the idea that your experience is in the iron grip of a designer in a medium where your freedom is what makes it unique? Well, if you've finished the game, you'll know that that's kind of the point.

When it comes to the game's puzzles, there are no duds. In part that's because *Inside* respects your time. If an idea is repeated in any way, that's only because there's another layer to it that's worth exploring or a way that it can be twisted to give it a new dimension. That means there's no fat to trim. You're always encountering something new, something interesting, something surprising, or shocking, or scary. There are few games that couldn't learn from it in that respect.

WHY IT'S A FUTURE CLASSIC

The best games leave you thinking about them when you're done and *Inside* certainly falls into that category. You'll think about the ending. You'll think about the journey. You'll think about what it all means and what *Inside* has to say about games.

It's far from the first attempt to reflect on control and agency through games – *BioShock* delivered its "Would You Kindly" moment all the way back in 2007, for example. However, it's arguable that no game has been as successful in holding up a mirror and playing with that theme, thanks to the way that *Inside* uses the language of games as its sole means of communicating with the player.

Even if that aspect of the game holds no interest for you, *Inside* still deserves its place in the canon of videogame classics. It deserves it for the brilliant puzzles, the clever ideas, the beautiful animation, the incredible sound design, and the way those elements are threaded together with supreme artistry and skill.

We're not sure we'd ever call a game perfect, but *Inside* is very close. *

Things of note

STAY IN LINE



This section where you have to follow the movements of shuffling slaves to hide in plain site is one of the most memorable. It shines with significance at the end.

LOOKING BACK



There are lots of *Limbo* parallels to spot in *Inside* but the most obvious is the cameo of the mind-controlling glow worm that's attached to this pig.

UNDERWATER EXPLORATION



Inside knows how to create tension and the game's terrifying underwater sections are some of the best examples of that.

POETRY IN MOTION

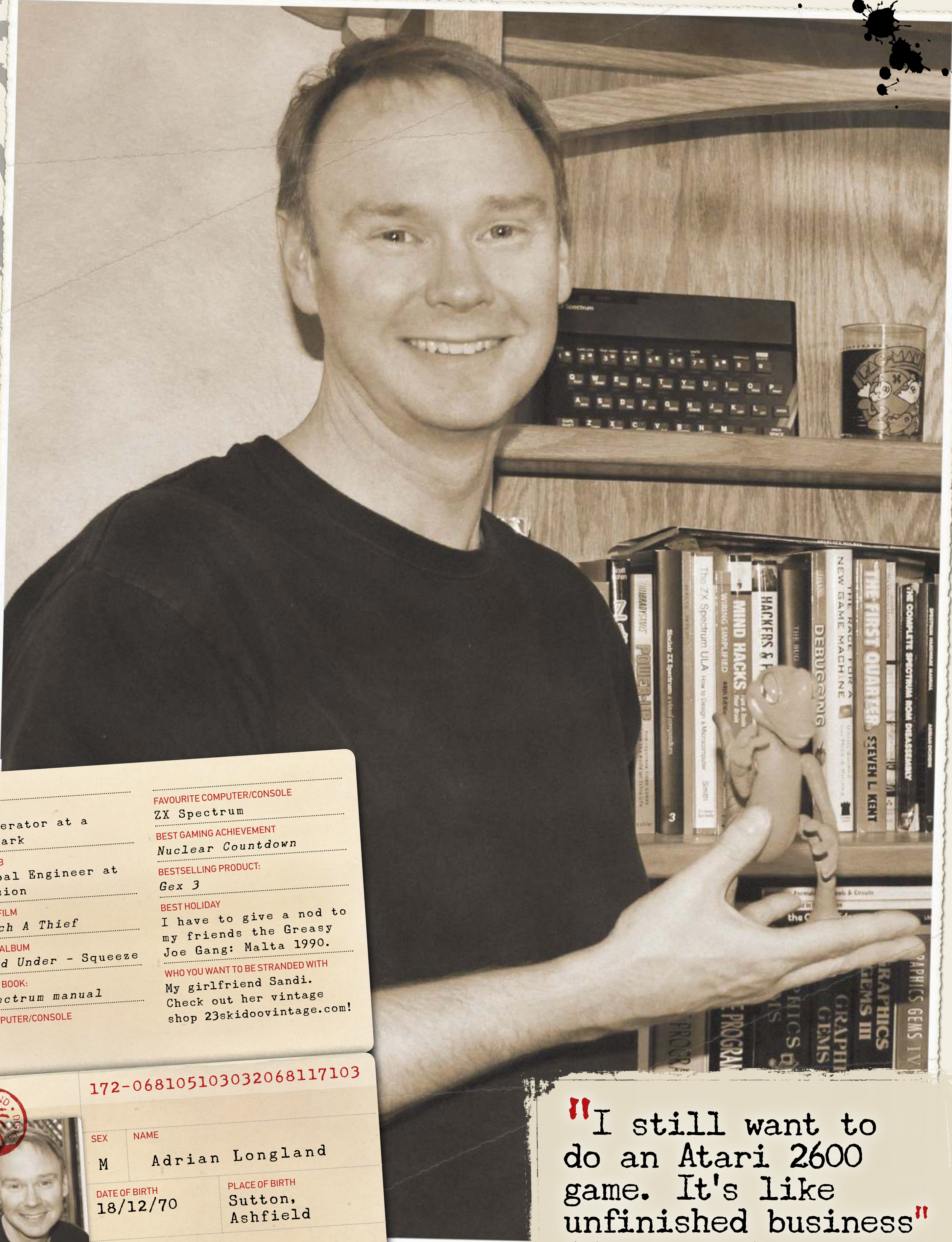


The animation in this game is fantastic. Not just because it feels realistic, but because subtle movements show you how characters are feeling.

CORNFIELD



There are a number of hidden secrets to discover in *Inside*. Once you've found them all, you'll want to return to this cornfield…



FIRST JOB
Ride operator at a Theme Park

CURRENT JOB
Principal Engineer at Activision

FAVOURITE FILM
To Catch A Thief

FAVOURITE ALBUM
45s and Under – Squeeze

FAVOURITE BOOK:
ZX Spectrum manual

FIRST COMPUTER/CONSOLE
ZX81

FAVOURITE COMPUTER/CONSOLE
ZX Spectrum

BEST GAMING ACHIEVEMENT
Nuclear Countdown

BESTSELLING PRODUCT:
Gex 3

BEST HOLIDAY
I have to give a nod to my friends the Greasy Joe Gang: Malta 1990.

WHO YOU WANT TO BE STRANDED WITH
My girlfriend Sandi. Check out her vintage shop 23skidoovintage.com!

172-0681051030320681171O3

SEX
M

NAME
Adrian Longland

DATE OF BIRTH
18/12/70

PLACE OF BIRTH
Sutton, Ashfield

BIOGRAPHY
Adrian began coding Spectrum games at school before moving to the US in the Nineties to work on 3DO and PlayStation titles. He still codes for modern consoles.

"I still want to do an Atari 2600 game. It's like unfinished business"
Adrian Longland

Desert Island Disks

Adrian Longland

What cherished games would you take to the island?

He has gone from coding Spectrum games in his bedroom to working on the biggest franchise in the world. He tells Paul Drury about answering Uncle Sam's call

Dear readers, we have an exclusive; before we maroon our latest castaway, he has agreed to leave behind an unreleased Spectrum game in our safe keeping and it involves assembling a plane to escape from an island – how apt.

"I tried to get *Cloud Hopper* published in *Your Sinclair* magazine but they turned it down because it went over the memory limits they had set," explains coder Adrian Longland, once of British shores but now settled in the USA. "It would have taken up a lot of pages and taken ages to type in all the machine code and, to be honest, it had missed it's time. If I came out in the early days of *Cookie* and *Ah Diddums*, it might have held its own. I made it ridiculously hard, too, but I've made some tweaks only yesterday…"

Three decades later and Adrian is still tinkering with his Spectrum. *Cloud Hopper* (imagine *Jetpac* with more clouds and extra features, such as lifts and a wind factor to cope with) is now considerably more fun and forgiving, and you can download the full game from the excellent gamesthatwerent.com.

He sensibly toned down the difficulty for his next effort, *Nuclear Countdown*, which did get an official release through Atlantis as a budget title. An isometric adventure involving a well-wired robot tasked with defusing warheads, it featured much block-shoving, problem-solving and traversing precarious moving platforms. Would it be fair to say you were somewhat in thrall to Ultimate Play The Game's offerings like *Knight Lore* and *Alien 8*, Adrian?

"Look at my list of desert island games and you'll see the admiration I have for those guys," he laughs. "They were always pushing the envelope. I'd preorder their games and would phone them up every day to see if they had sent it out yet! I was a fan. Still am."

Coding after school and at weekends, Adrian spent over a year creating *Nuclear Countdown*, meticulously designing each room with a custom level editor he had written and getting to grips with the isometric perspective through a slightly cumbersome combination of three screen buffers. "The graphics and animation for the walking robots are my proudest part," he grins. "I'm not an artist or animator and I admire those guys so much but that one character and animation I think are worthy of what a true artist and animator would have done."

The game can hold its robot head high in terms of its visuals and some of the puzzles can be fiendish, requiring lateral thinking and finger-mangling dexterity. It was generally well received by the gaming press of the day, with *Crash!* praising it as "a great little budget game" in issue 38, though it commented that the bargain price of £1.99, it was rather short.

"Yes, I should have made more screens," acknowledges Adrian, "particularly given the amount of work it was to write the level editor. I should have planned it all out on graph paper… but it was my baby and I was really happy *Nuclear Countdown* got published. Then a few weeks after I'd said yes to *Atlantis*, Mastertronic replied saying they wanted it! I've always regretted not holding out for a bigger publisher."

Nevertheless, the game pocketed Adrian £400 and he left his Nottinghamshire home for Southampton University to study Electronic Engineering, dreaming of making arcade hardware. He returned with a third-class degree and spent the next year pottering around on a government-sponsored Enterprise Allowance Scheme, trying to make Amiga games without much success. Fortunately, he spotted an advert for Psygnosis which was producing games for the FM Towns Marty console, one of the first machines to utilise CD-ROM technology. "They wanted someone to port their game *Microcosm* to the 3DO which was just about to be released. They saw I'd done Speccy games and had a degree, even if it was a crappy one, so I went up to join them in Liverpool. I was lucky [to get the job] and it was a real turning point in my life."

This early experience of working with the kind of CD technology which was about to revolutionise gaming ▶

Trivia

Adrian studied Computer Science at sixth form college in Beeston, just on the outskirts of Nottingham, and coded his first Spectrum games there – quite apt, as the town is where the Spectrum Vega is now manufactured.



Adrian's bedroom coding set up in 1991, just before he moved to the USA.



Cloud Hopper was Adrian's unreleased debut and a pretty decent game it is.

> "Crystal Dynamics seemed like Ultimate in the Spectrum days, like, 'Wow, how are they doing that?'"
> Adrian Longland

Praise for Adrian

Here's what **Retro Gamer** has to say about Adrian Longland's work...



Darran Jones
While I've not played many of the older games that Adrian has worked on, I did play a hell of a lot of *Samurai Shodown* on the 3DO when it first came out. It's also nice to see that he's a big fan of Rare's output as well, and that we both share a love for the rather excellent *Banjo-Kazooie*.



Paul Drury
It was great to hear how a fellow Nottingham boy crossed the pond and got involved with the emerging CD-based consoles that would change gaming forever. And though he now has a Californian twang from living there for 25 years, his homeland vowels did return after an hour of talking to me.

in the Nineties thanks to the PlayStation proved hugely beneficial for Adrian. After a year at Psygnosis, working on Microcosm and then the FMV on-rails shooter *Novastorm* with the team that would go on to create *WipEout*, he spotted an advert in *Edge* magazine asking for British coders to head Stateside to work on 3DO games for Crystal Dynamics. Relocating to California must have been quite an adventure for a Nottinghamshire lad in his early twenties, Adrian?

"Oh yeah. I'd been reading up on Crystal Dynamics and they had done games like *Crash and Burn*, *Total Eclipse* and *The Horde*. They kind of seemed like Ultimate had in the Spectrum days, like, 'Wow, how are they doing that!?' The place sounded amazing and I just knew I had to work there… though I've got red hair and fair skin so there was no beach for me!"

Hired to work on *Off-World Interceptor*, Adrian was first asked to help complete the port of *Samurai Shodown* from the Neo-Geo to the 3DO, which having grown up wishing he could work on arcade hardware was pretty damn close to his dream job. The project also involved working with Max Behensky and Stephanie Mott, the team behind Atari's seminal *Hard Drivin'* game, and he learned a lot about 3D technology from these pioneers, knowledge he could bring to *Off-World Interceptor* when he returned to his original brief. Though the game is a pretty speedy racer, placing you in the driving seat of a heavily armed moon buggy-turned-super truck, it is most memorable for some especially cheesy FMV scenes.

"When we got the video footage back, it was so bad that we thought, 'What can we do to save this?'" giggles Adrian. "There was this American TV show called *Mystery Science Theatre*, which takes an old movie and has these silhouetted heads talking over it, making fun of how terrible it is. Someone suggested we went with that same style for *Off-World Interceptor* and pretend it was meant to be a spoof!"

Clever thinking from Crystal Dynamics who also wisely assigned Adrian to focus on Sony's new PlayStation, which increasingly looked like it was the machine to back in the crowded mid-Nineties console market. He contributed to projects both in-house and externally developed, providing tools and technical advice to such titles as 1996's *Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain*, and landed the lead programmer role on *Gex: Enter the Gecko*. Was he made to wade through the original platformer before taking the sharp-tongued lizard into the third dimension, we wonder?

"No, it was never a requirement," he assures us. "It actually started as a 2D game and after three months we had a prototype with Gex jumping around and using this hover mechanic. Then E3 came along and suddenly it was, 'Okay, *Crash Bandicoot* shows you can do 3D graphics on the PlayStation and *Mario 64* has this open world… let's put those two together for *Gex*!"

Videogames can often be unintentionally hilarious but consciously trying to make a 'funny' game is a difficult act to pull off. When stand-up comedian Dana Gould agreed to provide the voice of Gex, we wonder if Adrian felt hopeful or concerned? "I liked what we were trying to do and I like games with a sense of humour," he says. "It can give a game a certain charm, like the quips in *Banjo-Kazooie*. With *Gex*, though, it was hard to see where the humour fell. We had all these lines from Dana Gould, thousands of them, and we had to take out hundreds because we didn't want to offend this famous person or risk getting sued by this company… we scratched out about half! It would have been way funnier if we'd just left them all in. There were definitely some tumbleweed moments.

Nonetheless, Adrian remains very proud of *Enter The Gecko*, and stuck with the green protagonist for *Gex 3: Deep Cover Gecko*, released in 1999. "Generally with a sequel you're constrained because people have certain expectations but I liked working on this one," says Adrian. "We had the engine,

Timeline

1985

CLOUD HOPPER
■ **YEAR:** 1985
■ **FORMAT:** ZX Spectrum
Adrian's first completed game was an interesting homage to *Jetpac*. Unreleased at the time, you can now download it from gamesthatwerent.com.



1987

NUCLEAR COUNTDOWN
■ **YEAR:** 1987
■ **FORMAT:** ZX Spectrum
This clever isometric adventure starring an intrepid robot tasked with diffusing warheads against the clock was Adrian's first published game.



1994

SAMURAI SHODOWN
■ **YEAR:** 1994
■ **FORMAT:** 3DO
Adrian's first job when he arrived Stateside was to convert this beat-'em-up from the Neo-Geo to the newly-released 3DO.



1995

OFF-WORLD INTERCEPTOR
■ **YEAR:** 1995
■ **FORMAT:** 3DO
A solid enough racer-turned-shooter, this is probably best remembered for the 'so bad they're good' cutscenes. Very much of its time.



That's me in the corner

Given Adrian has gone from bedroom coding, to working in small teams to being part of huge modern development studios, we wondered how he felt about the journey. "The pressure is different," he muses. "With *Gex*, there was maybe two programmers so if you were off, it mattered. Now, I'm one of a hundred programmers. I like to think that I'm important but I know if I dropped dead tomorrow, the game's still going to be on the shelves. Look at the credits list [of a modern game] and it has thousands of people on, like a movie, but actually you're [part of] a small team, say an animator, a designer, a programmer and an artist, focussing on one particular thing. You can still look at these huge games, pick out a feature and say, 'I did that!'"

the technology and the tools – all the things that take so much time – so it was about having more fun with the content. Every day you'd come in and the designers would have a new level or a new boss and you'd be like, 'Let me play that!' It was never a chore."

The *Gex* engine Adrian helped tune also formed the basis for the excellent *Legacy of Kain: Soul Reaver*, released the same year, and as the new millennium dawned, he was putting down firm roots in the USA, marrying a Californian native and starting a family. And what could be more Stars and Stripes than his next project, *Walt Disney World Quest: Magical Racing Tour*, which featured *Mickey Mouse*, *Donald Duck* and, erm, *The Chipmunks*. "That project actually started as a *Gex* game," explains Adrian. "We were merrily making a kart racing game thinking it would be set in the *Gex* universe. When we heard we had the Disney licence and it was going to feature all these really recognisable characters, I thought that was exciting. As a programmer, you're just trying to get the feel of the racing right, the way you go round corners… it really doesn't matter what character is in the kart!"

Whilst there was no shortage of titles following in *Mario Kart*'s slipstream, *Magical Tour Racing* is a decent enough clone, and we do enjoy seeing Barbie pushing out in front. It was to be Adrian's last published game at Crystal Dynamics, however. As the company began the transition from PlayStation to PS2 development, he decided to take the opportunity to set up a studio of his own. With fellow *Gex* programmer Daniel Chan, they founded *Heroes and Giants* and hoped ▶

Longland on Longland

Adrian picks his three favourite projects



■ **SAMURAI SHODOWN**
This was a fun port to do. Crystal Dynamics was crazy at the time. Working with legends, plus free massages daily and free food: sushi for lunch!



■ **GEX: ENTER THE GECKO**
This was a blast: working with 3D and the excitement of working on an original title, as I'd been doing ports since *Nuclear Countdown*.



■ **AFRO SAMURAI**
We got some of the *Gex* band from Crystal back together, including the incredible Gregg Tavares. David Robinson, the producer, did a great job making that happen.



Off World Interceptor: racing and blasting far from home.



» Adrian in the early Nineties next to a Cray-1 supercomputer from the Seventies. We've come a long way.

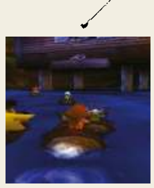
1998

GEX: ENTER THE GECKO
■ **YEAR:** 1998
■ **FORMAT:** PlayStation
There was a stampede of anthropomorphic 3D platformers following in *Crash Bandicoot*'s wake but *Gex* had some decent ideas of its own.



2000

WALT DISNEY WORLD QUEST
■ **YEAR:** 2000
■ **FORMAT:** PlayStation
Adrian's final game at Crystal Dynamics was this surprisingly good *Mario Kart* clone, with tracks based on rides from the famous theme parks.



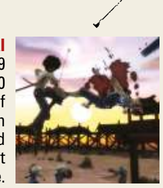
2004

HAMSTAR GOLF
■ **YEAR:** 2004
■ **FORMAT:** Mobile
A real oddity, this Japan-only phone game features the cute titular rodent negotiating crazy-ish courses. An above-par obscurity.



2009

AFRO SAMURAI
■ **YEAR:** 2009
■ **FORMAT:** PS3/360
An unlikely melding of ancient Japanese tradition with hip-hop beats and banter. Stylish swordplay but rather lacking in substance.



Readers' Questions

Merman: As a programmer, how much input did you have into game design?
It's very much a collaborative process. The designer has an idea of what they want and the programmer has an idea of what you can do. So you try something and the designer will give you feedback, like, 'I wanted it to be more like this,' and you'll say, 'Well, I could do it like this?' With Speccy games, it was just a programmer and an artist, if you were lucky. Designers are a modern invention. It very much depends on the people you're working with and the dynamic in the team. Only this week, I was brainstorming with the designer and I really felt I had some part in the design… but they had the vision of what they wanted. So my answer is, 'Some'!

Paranoid Marvin: What was the thinking behind getting Leslie Phillips involved in *Gex 3D* and did you get to meet him?
No, I didn't meet him. He has that campy style and I've always been a fan. I was excited he was involved but when I heard him delivering some of the lines, I wasn't sure it made sense. He was rereading the lines Dana Gould had said and adding a few of his own. To me, they could have made a better choice even though I love him as an actor.

Merman: Which other games influenced *Nuclear Countdown*?
***Highway Encounter* and *Knight Lore* as well for that isometric look.**

Merman: Did you ever crash your development hardware?
Yes, every day! We get errors and crashes all the time. If he means have I ever destroyed the devkit, that is pretty hard to do in software. I think there was an Apple machine you could overheat if you turned the fan off, but usually if you're a software developer, you can just turn the machine off and on again. Now, with hardware development, you can fry capacitors and get smoke!

► to emulate the success of Naughty Dog, which also began as a two-man start up. "The reality was harsh," sighs Adrian. "We had lots of experience with coding and gameplay but we soon realised that was only a fraction of what was needed. We made a 3D engine and had demos with characters running around but we never got to the point where a publisher could put money in. We needed a business person, a go-getter, who knew how to get us a deal."

As the pair's savings decreased, it ended up doing contract work for publishers like EA and their old bosses at Crystal Dynamics, which kept the company going but prevented them pushing ahead with their own ideas for original IP. They did manage to produce *Hamstar Golf* for the Japanese mobile phone market but it's far more likely you've played their GameCube conversion of *From Russia With Love*, a pretty varied *Bond* game which mixes driving, shooting and fisticuffs and includes a jet pack section, which we hope brought back pleasant memories of Adrian's unreleased debut *Cloud Hopper*. "You know I can't remember that bit," he laughs. "If you're porting a game, you're so focussed on making sure that everything works with the code, you don't always play the game through."

After calling time on their independent venture, Adrian got a job at Activision and joined the team working on *X-Men: The Official Game*, working on code optimisation, before getting involved with the interesting cultural mash-up that was *Afro Samurai*. With a distinctive art style and swords as big as the hairstyles, the game does offer some impressive slicing and dicing, all to a jaunty hip-hop beat, but the action can get a little repetitive and the early flush of good ideas dry up as the story trudges onward. "A magazine summed that game up pretty well," says Adrian. "They said it did the hard things really well but failed to get some of the basics right. Like, the slicing mechanic with the sword is great and super fun but a lot of the levels aren't designed to take advantage of that. We did a lot with a small team and we had people like Gregg Tavares, who did the work of ten people, but when you compare it with other games in the genre, it doesn't really stand up."

Trivia

The *Gex* engine Adrian helped develop was used for the *Tomb Raider* games when the franchise landed at Crystal Dynamics. He's rather proud that some of his code made it into Lara's games right up to the Xbox 360 era.

Adrian is named 'Longhold' on the credits for *Afro Samurai*, hopefully an indication of the rushed nature of its development rather than the studio's inability to spell. After a brief spell at EA working on the excellent *Dead Space*, he joined Sledgehammer in 2009 and suddenly Adrian found himself aboard the *Call Of Duty* juggernaut. The downside of being part of the biggest franchises in videogaming history is that he is not allowed to talk about his role –"The most nerve wracking [thing about my job is] talking to someone like you, making sure I don't say anything I'm not supposed to!" he admits – so we diplomatically don't mention the war and instead find out about his current projects away from the office.

Having accumulated four Atari 2600 consoles, Adrian has built an interface board to play custom ROMs and is keen to code on the ancient hardware. "I've always wanted to write an Atari 2600 game," he smiles. "Trying to make something fun to play in such a limited amount [of memory] and with only a few objects is a real challenge but games like *River Raid* show it can be done. I've also just bought a Timex 1000, the US version of the ZX81, and I want to do proper hi-res graphics on that. I've always wanted to know how they did stuff like that back then. It's like unfinished business."

He might be a Californian now but you'll never take the Sinclair out of the boy. *

Special thanks to Lawrence 'Little Boy Blue' Kirk, Adrian's step brother and Game Boy musician, for the introduction.

> "The video footage for Off-World Interceptor was so bad someone suggested we should pretend it was a spoof"
> *Adrian Longland*



Adrian joined the Gex gang for Enter the Gecko.

Adrian Longland Desert Island Disks

The games that Adrian simply couldn't live without

01 Lunar Jetman (ZX SPECTRUM)
Jetpac was my favourite early Spectrum game and *Lunar Jetman* added to the basic gameplay but allowed you to play in so many different ways. The ability to use the teleporter or the gun or the bomb in so many different ways makes the game so open ended. The tension with the missile coming at the base and making one last effort to lose a life by flying into it: intense!

02 Banjo-Kazooie (N64)
All the 3D platform gaming fun of *Mario 64*, but so much prettier. The texturing and animation are a pleasure. The British humour makes it a blast that holds up to this day. Having spent time trying to program *Gex*'s controls and camera to this level, I appreciate the artistry here. The camera is seldom in the way. That's hard to do.

03 Donkey Kong 64 (N64)
The different Kong abilities and replayability make this one easy to keep coming back to. The bonus games are infuriatingly difficult, but so addictive. Another 3D platformer? Yep, they are my favourite.

04 Donkey Kong Country (SNES)
I have the theme song in my head, and want to shout out the monkey sounds just thinking about this one. I love the Rare *Donkey Kong* universe. When this came out, those graphics were a marvel. Silicon Graphics rendered! Again, Rare took Nintendo style platform gameplay but made it so much prettier and somehow even more fun.

05 Knight Lore (ZX SPECTRUM)
All the Ulimate games on the Spectrum were amazing. When I first saw this, I thought it was impossible. How are they doing that? This was one game that the Commodore 64, although better in many ways, just couldn't do – and that certainly helped in the Speccy vs C64 playground battle. Just to be clear, the C64 was perfectly capable, just too cool to do a game like this. Google videos on the colourised remakes. The game is very much alive.

06 Pac-Man (ARCADE)
The arcade was what the Speccy games aspired to and this is my all-time favourite classic. So easy to start playing but it quickly gets difficult. It seems most 8-bit consoles were judged, and sometimes suffered, based on the quality of their *Pac-Man* ports. This was the gold standard.

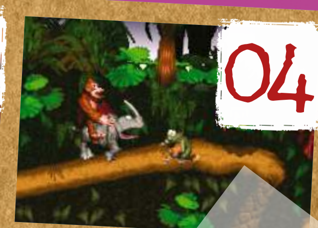
07 Donkey Kong (ARCADE)
Still fun but incredibly challenging. It spawned the *Mario* universe; I'll say no more.

08 Quazatron (ZX SPECTRUM)
The two-channel music on the title screen still has me baffled. The robot grapple puzzles were the best part… that could have been the game all by itself.



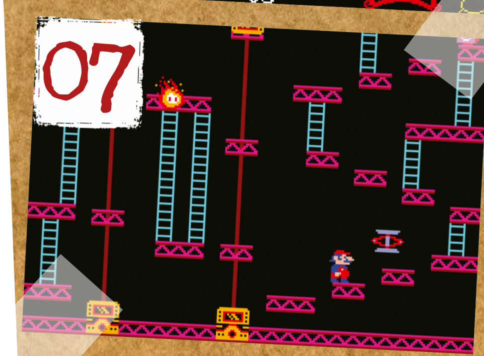
















1500 points



Jet Set Radio

TRAGICALLY HIP

» DREAMCAST » SMILEBIT » 2000

Flash back to November 2000, a time when most gamers were wetting their knickers about being able to play prettier renditions of *Tekken* and *Ridge Racer* on the PS2. Not me, though. I was too cool for that – I was head over heels in love with *Jet Set Radio*. Sega's rollerblading graffiti game looked cool, sounded awesome and had an original concept. It was also quite obviously going to be a sales flop.

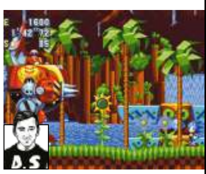
I should have seen it coming, really, the signs were all there: there was the fact that it didn't look like anything else, and wasn't easily pigeonholed into an existing genre. Even without those factors, it should have been impossible to ignore my cousin's complaint, "But the tricks aren't even real." The general public didn't want highly stylised teenage vandalism games, they wanted staple concepts like fighting and racing with photorealistic graphics. As a heavily invested gamer, I wanted something different to the norm, but the norm doesn't spring up out of nowhere.

Two months later Sega announced its withdrawal from the hardware business and I shook my head. "This wouldn't have happened if people had bought nice original games like *Jet Set Radio* instead of tarted-up rehashes," I naively and snobbishly condemned. There was a lot more to the Dreamcast's failure than that, of course, but to this day there's that horrible hipster part of me that can't help but think of *Jet Set Radio* as a brilliant game, which only failed because of other people's poor taste. *



>> Does Sonic Mania live up to the hype? You'll discover the answer shortly. It's otherwise a quiet month, with a look at Andy Remic's new documentary about the Spectrum and Namco's latest Switch retro compilation

✱ PICKS OF THE MONTH



DREW
Sonic Mania
It's been near-on 20 years but *Sonic* fans can breathe easy, he's legit again… well, for now.



NICK
Sonic Mania
Puyo Puyo Tetris was a hard habit to shake, but you can see above that *Sonic Mania*'s totally different!



» [PS4] Fans of Wing Fortress Zone will be pleased to know that a plane-based stage is included.

Sonic Mania

HOW FAST IS A FAN-PROPELLED HEDGEHOG?

INFORMATION

» **FEATURED SYSTEM:** PS4
» **ALSO ON:** XBOX ONE, SWITCH, PC
» **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
» **PRICE:** £15.99
» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
» **DEVELOPER:** CHRISTIAN WHITEHEAD/ HEADCANNON GAMES/ PAGODAWEST GAMES
» **PLAYERS:** 1-2



It's always nice to see game developers embracing the creativity of their fans. Nintendo's *Super Mario Maker* was a great example of what could be achieved by doing so – by providing the level design tools previously only available to ROM modders, it made a bunch of money and a YouTube phenomenon. Of course, the problem was that your play experience was dependent on the skill of the designer, so things could be a bit uneven. Sega has decided to utilise the talent of fans for *Sonic Mania*, but it has taken a different approach by simply hiring the cream of the crop to lead a development team.

In many ways, the remix culture of ROM modders and fangame creators is the perfect fit for *Sonic Mania*, as the majority of the game's 12 zones are heavily reworked stages from the classic 16-bit *Sonic* games. The changes can be quite large – Green Hill Zone gains a network of ziplines and a cavernous background and Oil Ocean Zone gains submarines to explore. The remaining four are brand new, and range from the film-inspired Studiopolis Zone to the Wild West-themed Mirage Saloon Zone. Each stage is large and packed with enemies and obstacles, with plenty of scope for exploration – and you'll need to look around if you're trying to find the giant rings which allow you to enter the Special Zone. If you just want to go fast, that's fine too, but as in the classic games you'll have to earn your fast times with practice.

You can play as Sonic and Tails, either of them individually or Knuckles, and all of them have their characteristic abilities – Tails can swim and fly, while Knuckles can glide, climb and access exclusive routes by smashing through walls. Sonic



BRIEF HISTORY

» Sega has been actively trying to court older *Sonic* fans since 2010's *Sonic The Hedgehog 4: Episode I*, with mixed results. *Sonic Mania* is the latest attempt to do so, with long-term *Sonic* fans Christian Whitehead and Headcannon Games at the helm following their acclaimed mobile remasters of the Mega Drive originals.

» [PS4] The tiny Sonic from *Sonic CD* returns, and this time even gets to fight a boss.





» [PS4] It's the return of the 'Blue Spheres' game, which is just as irritatingly tough as you remember.



» [PS4] The Hard-Boiled Heavies are recurring bosses in *Mania*, attacking both individually and as a group.

has a new move, the Drop Dash, which is pulled off by pressing and holding the jump button during a jump. When Sonic lands, he'll gain a burst of acceleration and roll off in the direction he's facing. It should be very useful in the Time Attack mode, but will require practice to deploy effectively.

The best thing about *Sonic Mania* is that it addresses one of the weakest aspects of the original games – the boss fights. The new ones in *Sonic Mania* are exciting but more importantly, they're inventive. Without wishing to spoil too much, the new Studiopolis Zone has one in which you have to watch the TV weather report in the background to know what Robotnik's next attack will be. Others have you battling in a lift, limiting your jump height, or fighting as a miniaturised Sonic. These can put up a real fight – we're pretty good at Sonic games, but some of the tougher bosses (especially Oil Ocean Zone's main boss) made the possibility of a Game Over screen worryingly real.

Visually, the game has been designed as if it were for the Saturn, rather than the Mega Drive. Though the stages have been cribbed from a variety of games, it's clear that work has gone into bringing the various art styles together. Sprites have fantastic animation, with more frames than the Mega Drive originals, and the colours on screen are far beyond what the 16-bit machine could have displayed. In limited cases, low-polygon 3D models are even used to spice things up a bit, but these are mostly reserved for the game's brand-new Special Zone.



» [PS4] Knuckles takes one of Green Hill Zone's new zip lines through an enormous cavern.

In the Special Zone, you'll chase an emerald-carrying UFO while collecting blue spheres to speed up and rings to extend your time limit, but avoiding hazards such as bottomless pits and spiked balls. Sonic's handling here definitely requires some getting used to and getting all seven emeralds will test your skills as a result. The 'Blue Spheres' bonus stages also returns from *Sonic 3 & Knuckles*. There are 32 of these, and completing them unlocks additional bonuses such as techniques from older games.

Heavily invested *Sonic* fans will be pleased to know that the game is full of awesome nods to the history of the series – scrapped enemies finally get their day in the sun, long-forgotten characters show up in the most unexpected places, and at least one spin-off forms a key part of the game. Even the Master System and Game Gear Sonic games, which tend not to get a whole lot of love since they were developed outside of Sega, get their own references.

The 'greatest hits' approach to *Sonic Mania*'s content serves the game very well – it reminds you just how good those original games were, with the changes ensuring that you're not just retreading old ground. It also highlights the quality of the brand-new content, as it fits right in with the classic stages and concepts. In fact, the weakest areas of the game seem to be those rare points where too few changes have been made to the classic stages. Maybe that's just familiarity talking, mind.



If you're a big *Sonic* fan, this game has been developed for you by people like you, so you'll love it. For others, it's a great platformer filled with action, secrets and gorgeous sprite work, and comes highly recommended. ✱

In a nutshell

Thanks to an understanding of what made the 16-bit games so good, the *Mania* team has created an excellent platform game which delivers new thrills and nostalgic comfort.

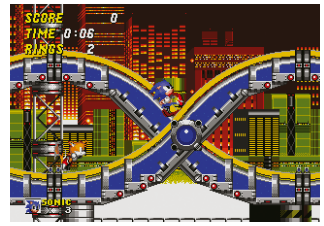
>> Score **92%**





✱ WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
SONIC JAM (SATURN)



▼ SOMETHING NEW
FREEDOM PLANET (PC)



PICK OF THE MONTH

Memoirs Of A Spectrum Addict

» Cost: £10 (digital) £20 (DVD) £25 (Blu-Ray)
» Buy it from: www.remicmedia.com/speccyaddict

Like many Kickstarter projects, Andy Remic's love letter to the ZX Spectrum has been a long time coming. We'd argue, though, that for many of the film's backers it's been well worth the wait as it gives a charming insight into why so many people love Sir Clive Sinclair's 8-bit micro.

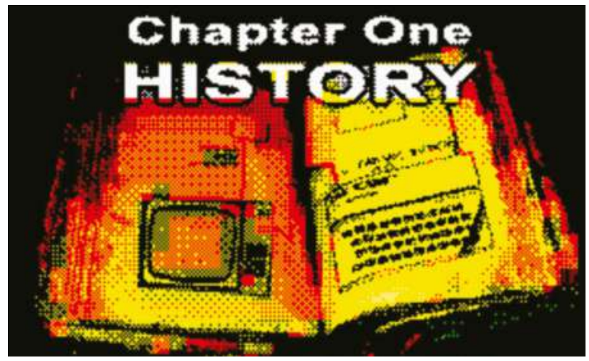
If you're looking for an in-depth history lesson on the ZX Spectrum then *Memoirs* will leave you disappointed. While there's a small segment about the machine's origins in the first chapter (all of the chapters have title cards that 'boot up' like a Speccy loading screen) *Memoirs* is more interested in talking to the people who worked on the games, from publishers, like Andrew Hewson, to well-regarded developers like Jim Bagley and the Oliver twins. A large variety of topics are covered, from favourite games and magazines to discussions on piracy and the issues coders faced working on the machine, but the answers are never dull to listen to, even when they are topics that we've seen discussed many times in the past.

It helps that Andy has interviewed a number of developers who are either extremely engaging or wonderfully frank, with Simon Butler's no-nonsense approach to questions like piracy being exceptionally honest and entertaining. It lacks the professionalism of similar documentaries, but there's a heart and personality to *Memoirs*, which is missing from its many peers. This passion is perhaps best summed up in the re-enactments, which show a young Andy opening his first Spectrum and snuggling up in bed to read the latest issue of *Crash* magazine. There are snippets of school kids sharing the latest games at school, too, which are bound to get the nostalgia juices flowing.

Memoirs Of A Spectrum Addict is a little rough around the edges, but like the Spectrum itself, it just adds to its charm. It's a delightful labour of love that won't necessarily enlighten you, but will fill you with a warm Ready Brek-like glow.



» There's a great range of developers, including Steve Wetherill. *Memoirs Of A Spectrum Addict* does a great job of covering all bases.



» They take a while to transition, but the start of each chapter is always worth the wait.

Namco Museum

» System: Switch **» Cost:** £29.99 **» Buy it from:** Switch eShop



» [Switch] *Galaga '88* is an excellent exclusion, making the inclusion of *Galaga* feel like a wasted game slot.



The *Namco Museum* series has been running since 1995 and in that time the company behind *Pac-Man*, *Galaga* and *Dig Dug* has revisited nearly 40 of its classic arcade games across six volumes. It's a pity, then, that so few of them appear on this latest compendium for the Switch. The included arcade games are *Pac-Man*, *Galaga*, *Dig Dug*, *The Tower Of Druaga*, *Sky Kid*, *Rolling Thunder*, *Galaga '88*, *Splatterhouse*, *Rolling Thunder 2* and *Tank Force*. Additionally, there's a new version of the excellent *Pac-Man Vs*, which now features a new three-player option for those that don't have access to a second Switch. It's a decent library of games, particularly as *Rolling Thunder 2*, *Splatterhouse* and *Tank Force* have never appeared in earlier *Museum* collections from the company, but it's not very diverse, when it comes to the genres it represents.

Fortunately, while the lack of games is something of a disappointment, the emulation throughout is excellent, allowing you to make countless tweaks to the display and sound, including adjusting the intensity of scanlines or even altering the reverb length. It's even possible to switch your Switch (ho-ho) 90 degrees to make better use of the vertical games but Namco didn't switch the controls in this option, meaning you have to use a detached Joycon, which is, frankly, rubbish. It's the only sour point we have



though, with the emulation being every bit as good as the slick presentation.

We're also guessing that Namco is a big fan of *Rare Replay*, as *Namco Museum* also features a challenge on each of its games that range from rescuing a set amount of ships in *Galaga* to defeating a boss in *Splatterhouse* in under five minutes. They're a nice addition to the series, adding that little bit of extra longevity.

The jewel of the crown is the excellent rendition of *Pac-Man Vs* that has been included. While you can only play as the ghosts on one Switch, it's still tremendous fun. The price tag feels a little steep for the small amount of similar games that are available, but there's no denying that *Namco Museum* is a decent product.

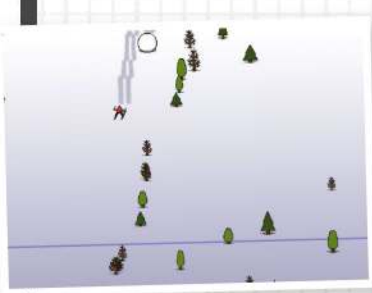
» **Score 69%**



» [Web] Fighting against gravity, avoiding spikes and trying to get to the portal.



» [Windows] Taking to the skies in search of enemy planes to shoot down.



» [Web] It's a race against time in *Super Aspen*… time and that huge snowball.

GOING BACK IN TIME

The topic of the RemakeJam this year was simple, but it allowed for a wide range of games. Coders were challenged to remake their own first game using all of the design and programming skills that they had picked up since it was written, so how that affects the releases varies greatly in part because some of the programmers who entered the game jam had been going for less time than other homebrew veterans.

In the case of shoot-'em-up *Spitfire Scramble,* for example, only the basics of the original game design remain – that first version is still playable online via Flash – and the mission now is to defend a factory from airborne attackers. *GalAttack* is another shooter, but this time based on the arcade classic *Galaxian* and the developer claims to be too old to remember which was his first game, so this is from somewhere in his first ten. Sticking with action games, *Project Home* is influenced by bullet hell shooters, except that the player is given a sword while their enemies get to let fly with the projectiles, so strategy is as important as reflexes.

There are more puzzle-oriented games to choose from as well: *Gravityball DX* is a simple, but effective, platform-based challenge where any horizontal movement of the ball causes it to leap into the air even if it was already in the middle of a jump. *Lady Luck's Due* doesn't rely on action, instead offering a version of Blackjack with a backstory revolving around a gambler trying to escape from limbo, or at least unlock a free play mode – it's also one of the few entries to have a price tag – while word games are the order of the day in *Big Bot's Crossword Adventure* where the titular robot must solve word puzzles that will get the factory up and running.

It has to be noted that some of the titles are a little what we like to call 'out there' as well. *Attack Of The Killer Vegetables '98* is another shoot-'em-up where the veggies are trying to take over the world, the *Last Rectangle* just wants its tea so it must find everything that's required. *Void Feeders* is described by its programmers as a "mood piece" in its current state because they ran out of time. All of the 64 entries can be found at Itch.io behind Kikstart.eu/remake-jam-2017 and there should be something for most gamers to enjoy there.

NEW GAMES NEEDED

If you have a homebrew project you would like to see featured then please contact us at: **darran.jones@futurenet.com**



» [Amstrad CPC] Time for some bullet hell with *Dragon Attack*.

DEVELOPING FOR THE CPC

Last year's CPCRetroDev competition was responsible for the release of over 30 new games for the Amstrad CPC, including titles like isometric adventure *Hire Hare*, the colourful, Wild West-themed *Outlaws* and *Dragon Attack*, a very busy bullet hell-style shoot-'em-up.

The 2017 iteration of the competition is now under way behind Kikstart.eu/cpc-retro-dev-2017 and we're hoping for great things after the previous years. There's a significant prize pool available to Amstrad coders who fancy the challenge too, with the deadline being on the last day of October 2017.

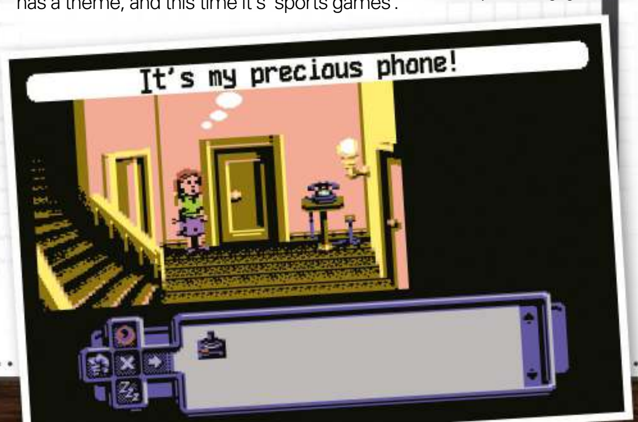
"There's a significant prize pool available to Amstrad coders"

EVEN MORE COMPETITION

Another regular competition is the C64-based contest run by Forum64. The last instalment was rather quiet with just a couple of strategy games, but in 2015 there was an impressive crop of releases and the winner was the superb *Caren And The Tangled Tentacles*, a Lucasfilm Games-style point-and-click adventure.

This time publishers Protovision is involved in running things as well – Kikstart.eu/f64pgc-2017 goes to the page on its website – and the deadline is the end of April 2018. This competition always has a theme, and this time it's 'sports games'.

» [C64] Caren's adventure gets off to a noisy start; her phone is ringing.





» [ZX Spectrum] If run-and-gun action is you're style, how about this?

·HOMEBREW HEROES·

Graham Richards likes recently created 8-bit games so much that he acts as a publisher for new titles at MonumentMicrogames.com – we got him to stop the production line long enough for a quick chat



THE BIG INTERVIEW
Graham Richards

Where did the idea of Monument Microgames come from?
It actually stems back to late in 1991. I guess that everyone on the planet has at some point, dreamed of running a ZX Spectrum software house, and this is where my dream started. Inspired by Zenobi Software, I got together with a friend and we started penning out ideas for games and doing some BASIC programming. Under the name of Lycanthrope Software, we sent off some of the results to *Crash* magazine, who were kind enough to put us out of our misery.

Four months later, when the Spectrum was nearing the end of its commercial life, I had accumulated lots of duplicate software and I was adamant to set up some sort of 8-bit related sideline, and so, going it alone this time, 'Monument Classical Computer Gaming' was born. From word of mouth, to taking out ads in a fanzine, MCCG kept me busy for quite a few years until all the doubles had been sold. Things all went quiet on the gaming front for a while and, although I never stopped playing, I felt sure that I'd got the selling bug out of my system.

Then 2003 happened. I was certain that someone out there had to be publishing Spectrum games. So I picked up the latest copy of *Micro Mart*, thumbed through, and there was the answer: Cronosoft. I started collecting right away, and following the release of *Higgledy Piggeldy* I got fairly chatty with the owner, Simon Ullyatt. Before long I was helping out, drawing covers, duplicating tapes, designing the labels and headhunting programmers. That did it, the old fires and aspirations had been rekindled. It became apparent that there was far more software being made than Simon could handle, so in 2012 I asked his permission to dust off Monument and start publishing. Being the wonderful chap he is, he was full of encouragement.

And which platforms are you publishing for?
Initially the ZX Spectrum, though I've always said that we'll cater for anything. We now have ZX81 and Spectrum Next games on the cards, plus a couple for the CPC on the horizon. Recently we put a Commodore PET game on our website, courtesy of Donkeysoft. That was fun!

What kind of feedback have you received?
It's been encouraging. The feedback that has made me smile, is Monument being described as the, 'big-budget' homebrew house. We've also received a couple of harsh reviews, but for some sick reason I love reading those as well. On the plus side, even the bad reviews acknowledge our dedication to putting together a quality package. And we're still gaining new followers. It's nice to find so many lovely people, passionate about new Spectrum games.

Are there any new titles in the works?
Oh yes. There are a few luminaries of yesteryear that are involved in upcoming releases, and I can't wait to show you the results.

And finally, how can developers contact you about their game?
Feel free to tap us up on Facebook, or email us at microgames2000@yahoo.co.uk.

Gaming REVIEWS

·DO YOU· REMEMBER?

The Atari ST's *Alien Blockade* is a version of *Qix* where the objective is to draw lines across the playfield, boxing in a collection of bouncing lines until a certain percentage of the space is removed. Areas are closed off using the trail left behind by the player's craft as it moves around, but a life will be lost should anything touch an incomplete line or the enemies hit the craft.

There's a time limit which needs to be watched and the difficulty goes up as the space is reduced as well so the player has plenty to deal with even before the line-tracing enemies start to appear. There are only two background images but artistic Atari ST owners with some knowledge of the machine can add more to customise their game. Head on over to Kikstart.eu/alien-blockade-st.



» [Atari ST] I wonder what this is going to be when it's finished?



» [Atari ST] There's an enemy chasing around the playfield to worry about now.





» [BBC] Just warming up before the real challenge begins…

TRAILBLAZER

» **FORMAT:** BBC MICRO » **DEVELOPER:** DARREN COLES » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/TRAILBLAZER-BBC » **PRICE:** FREE



» [BBC Micro] Pete probably needs to get the council in for those pesky potholes.



» [BBC Micro] Some of the level names are less-than-subtle hints.

Taking control of a football as it blazes a trail over tracks of brightly coloured tiles which seem to hover in space sounds fun, but it's certainly not easy – this is a race against the clock which requires lightning-fast reactions and skill. Some of the tiles do more than merely allow the ball to roll across them as well. Purple and red will speed up and slow down the ball respectively, green makes it jump, and cyan reverses the controls, so keeping these in mind is essential to completing the stages.

Having the controls messed with wouldn't be a problem if there weren't any hazards, of course, and in this case they're the holes in the track which must either be navigated around or leapt over. Although there's a limited stock of jumps available to use, this is where knowledge of the tiles comes in handy because missing the green 'bounce' tile while hurtling towards a hole will usually see the ball flying off the edge and plunging downwards into the abyss, wasting precious seconds.

Developed by Mr Chip software over 30 years ago, *Trailblazer* has been converted to a raft of systems and seen several clones as well, including the likes of *Sphere Of Destiny* and its sequel on the BBC Micro. But this is an actual conversion of the original that is based on the one Gremlin released for the Spectrum and employing similar programming tricks to those used on some of the other platforms in order to produce a smooth moving game.

Getting through each stage will require some learning of its map – all of the later ones need some very precise navigation – so there's a practice mode included where the timer and jump counter are disabled and specific levels can be played repeatedly as required before taking them on in arcade mode. It's both addictive and frustrating in equal measure, getting through a tricky stage feels good but one slip can lead to a series of time consuming errors that in turn end the current run.

>> Score **91%**

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QUASARIUS

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE AMIGA
» **DEVELOPER:** RALIZA SOFTWARE » **PRICE:** FREE
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/QUASARIUS-AMIGA



» [Amiga] The boss isn't taking any prisoners or sparing the bullets.

***Quasarius* is a shoot-'em-up which borrows a few ideas from legendary classic coin-ops, like *Space Invaders* and *Galaxian*.** There are three types of stage to blast through, these are a wave of aliens, followed by a boss battle and finally there's a high-speed flight through space to the next combat zone.

There is a lot of replay value from the game's randomness, with the bullet patterns for the boss and the starting patterns for the waves being selected from a number of options. Everything gets more difficult with each pass, too, with nasties becoming more trigger happy and deadly asteroids starting to appear during the space flight.

There are tokens to pick up for bonuses but there's a lot to concentrate on besides them pilots need to be vigilant even on the very earliest stages, otherwise their limited stock of lives will soon be depleted.

>> Score **84%**





» [ZX Spectrum] Letting loose with the bullets and hoping for a top up.



» [ZX Spectrum] Weaving carefully through a room full of potentially fatal robots.

ROBOPROBE/48

» **FORMAT:** SINCLAIR SPECTRUM » **DEVELOPER:** STEPHEN NICHOL
» **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/ROBOPROBE-SPEC » **PRICE:** FREE

Repair droids get all the nasty jobs and the star of *Roboprobe/48* is no exception. The space station it's aboard has been sabotaged and set on a collision course with the planet Zircliv 48. To make matters worse, the controls have been disabled and every other drone aboard was reprogrammed to be hazardous. These can be shot, but ammunition is limited so it's better to manoeuvre around rather than blasting them.

There are 55 objects dotted around station AZ-101-D1 which when gathered can be used together in order to fix the controls and prevent the impending collision, but contact with the enemies will drain much-needed power and running out leaves both the station and planet Zircliv without any hope. Finding the recharge points to keep the droid running is a sensible idea, as is picking up ammo dropped by shot enemies.

>> Score **83%**

ROUNDUP

In *Legend Of The Lost Catacombs* for the VIC 20, the legendary hero Victor has broken an ancient and powerful gemstone into six pieces to prevent the Demon lord Darkwon using its power to conquer the world. Victor guards these fragments, but a replacement is needed, so a novice monk has been trained and must find all the pieces to step into that role. Follow Kikstart.eu/catacombs-vic.

It's a work in progress at the moment, but *Caves Of Zargon* is a flip screen action game for the Atari 2600 which is like a simplified version of *Thrust*. The player's vehicle must ascend through the caves, avoiding collisions with the walls and replenishing its limited fuel supply along the way. The playable preview can be downloaded: Kikstart.eu/zargon-2600 will take you there.



STRANDED

» **FORMAT:** COMMODORE 64 » **DEVELOPER:** LINUS 'LFT' ÅKESSON » **DOWNLOAD:** KIKSTART.EU/STRANDED-C64 » **PRICE:** FREE

Running out of petrol in the middle of nowhere is a problem, and for some reason the service station that you've coasted into doesn't take cash. Instead, customers have to be a registered Card 'O Fortune holder, but arranging that in a backwater town that seems to work on a barter system is going to be tough. It really doesn't help that some of the people aren't exactly friendly towards strangers, either.

All of the interaction is handled with a pointer-based system, with the cursor keys cycling through areas of interest in each screen, number keys selecting one of five actions and return executing the chosen command. *Stranded* was originally written in 1999 by a then 17-year-old Lft for the TI-83 which explains the low-resolution graphics, but underneath that chunky exterior is a point and click style adventure with an unusual setting and quirky puzzles.

>> Score **88%**



» [C64] Well, well. What do we have here then? Oh, it's a hole.





MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – **WWW.RETROGAMER.NET**

WIN! Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a spanking copy of either our NES/Master System or SNES/Mega Drive books



BEAT THE TEAM

GALAGA '88



Since we've done a PC Engine cover, we chose one of the console's many excellent arcade conversions to compete on. It has proven to be a constant source of distraction, too…



NICK **457,280**

"Remember, you can get your blue warp tokens by shooting down merged enemies. The game gets harder with each warp but if you can survive, you'll score far more points."



DREW **360,450**

"I knew challenging Nick would be futile, so I experimented with accuracy instead. I got this score with a 80.4 per cent hit rate. Not bad!"



SAM **275,750**

"I found a useful strategy here was to watch what Nick did and then do that. Also, the tried-and-tested method of trolling Darran during his runs seemed to yield positive results."



DARRAN **215,410**

"Okay, I'm simply not young enough any more. My hands aren't what they used to be in my shmup heyday. I gave up in the first few moments."

STAR LETTER

FOREVER CONFUSED

Hi chaps,
Is it just me that is completely baffled by Sega? They go and whip up loads of attention for this new Sega Forever thing, and the idea sounds amazing (I mean, who doesn't want free retro games?) but then they go and ruin it with poor emulation. I'd love to have a version of *Altered Beast* to play on the train to work, but they've made such a pig's ear of running the game that it just isn't fun.

This is just like with those terrible Mega Drive clone consoles that come out every year – how do they keep getting licensed? Surely the NES Mini must have made Sega realise that if they did a better job with these machines, they'd make a lot more money from them. But no, this company has an amazing back catalogue and somehow constantly finds ways to undermine it.

Of course, they also have those brilliant *3D Classics* games on the 3DS, so they must know what decent emulation looks like. Why won't Sega insist on the same kind of quality in their other retro releases?

Will Huggett

You're not the only one that's confused, Will. The company seemed to have better optimised emulation years ago with its early iOS releases, and we can't understand why the Sega Forever releases are so broken now.

Although it's probable that different people are signing off on different projects, we're not sure why there's no consistent quality standard. It shouldn't be hard for Sega to get hold of a Mega Drive, compare the real deal to the emulation and make sure that they match up – and that's what it's going to need to do if retro enthusiasts are going to get on board with Sega Forever or the hardware clones.



» [iOS] The iOS version of *Altered Beast* chugs, and it really shouldn't considering the hardware it's running on.

IT'S A DATE

Hi *RG*,
I feel like other readers are going to laugh at me for asking this, but it needs to be asked: isn't it about time you guys covered the dating simulator genre?

I know it's for 'freaks' and 'weirdos' but these games have started to filter through to the West, even if it's mostly because of less serious games like *Hatoful Boyfriend* and *Dream Daddy*. But in Japan, games like *Tokimeki Memorial*, *Sentimental Graffiti* and *LovePlus* were big hits, and the genre's mechanics have been adopted by games such as *Sakura Taisen* and *Persona*.

There's also a lot of interesting history to the genre if you're willing to uncover it – for example, SNK produced a line of dating sims featuring its female characters, a man once married his virtual girlfriend, and Konami crowdfunded production of *Tokimeki Memorial 3* way before the likes of Kickstarter got going.

So what do you say? Do I have a point, or am I crazy?

Anon

We reckon you do have a point, mystery reader. While it's not the most mainstream of genres and its fans can be considered somewhat eccentric, it's not something we'd be against covering in principle. However, we don't feel like we could do the genre justice right now.

The problem is that many of the important games in the genre require stronger Japanese language skills than we possess, so we're completely unfamiliar with them. We'd be failing our readers if we couldn't explain the appeal of the games from our own experience. Fear not, though – when somebody comes along with the correct expertise, we'll give this much-maligned genre some fair coverage.



» [PC Engine] Only one of our in-house team can claim to speak a bit of Japanese, and even that's a stretch. If you're fluent in the language, and can string a sentence together, get in touch!

BUT IS IT RETRO?

Oi, you lot,
Stop it. You know very well what I mean, too – you put a PlayStation 2 game on the cover, as if that's somehow retro. I could just about tolerate seeing the likes of *Black* and *Halo* covered in the magazine, but now you're parading *Final Fantasy XII* as if that's the sort of game this magazine should be about? Come on, these are just modern games with worse graphics and *Final Fantasy XII* was released basically yesterday.

If you're moving away from the classic gaming stuff towards this, I might be forced to reconsider buying the magazine. Please don't make me do that.

Alan Greeves

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We'll always have a place for the 8-bit and 16-bit formats in the magazine, but retro gaming is not a fixed, unchanging thing. The PS2 is 17 years old, the most popular console ever, and home to many great games. The people who spent their teenage years on the machine are adults now, and we'd be doing them a disservice if we didn't cover it.

ALL A DREAM

It was great to see **Retro Gamer** mention *Phantasy Star Online* for Dreamcast's community servers in a recent issue. This inspired me to look into getting myself a Dreamcast after over-looking the console originally, and to get the thing back online after a decade of the official servers being down. I have never been happier.

I have connected with a long-lost community in *Phantasy Star Online*, where I have found UK and USA players more than willing to assist a 'n00b' to level up and have enjoyed fragging sessions in another timeless classic, *Quake III Arena*. It seems the retro gaming community has gone to great lengths to keep this community alive, albeit, a small one. So let's make it grow, together.

So here is my call to arms to a lost generation of online gamers, get yourselves a DreamPi (a great alternative to the lesser-supported and very expensive broadband adapter), virtually any Pi will do to act as a Wi-Fi adapter for your DC, get your Dreamcast back online and join us, whether it be for the first time, or returning to the DC. Let's make this community grow, let's have epic online experiences with this underrated system with some quality online games.

Readers can find an excellent guide on YouTube on the DreamcasticChannel channel and a wealth of resources on dreamcastlive.net. The parts are inexpensive, I got mine online for less than £50 and access is free.
Do something really special, get your Dreamcast back online!

Mike Brown

You heard the man – give it a go!

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

DS XS

"Don't let me buy any games," declares Darran. Ten minutes later, he's off to Bournemouth's CeX. "Don't buy any games," we all remind him. He comes back with a DS game and a DSi XL. We can't remember the last time a day passed without a DS game arriving in the post.





» [Dreamcast] *Phantasy Star Online* is sure to strike a chord with most Dreamcast owners.



From the forum

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on the forum and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

How do you enjoy the Spectrum today?



seekingvirtue
I love reading about the ingenuity and seeing all the homebrews. Diverse and solitary colours is something I never get over. Everything for me is emulation based, though I am hoping to get my hands on a Spectrum Next.

paranoid marvin
Great to see that so many Speccy programmers from back in the day are still loving the machine 35 years on. Hopefully we'll see many of them creating games for the Spectrum Next.

fredghostmaster
I mostly play Spectrum games on a DS these days. A Spectrum in your pocket, who knew that day would come all those years ago!

Big Shoes
I still love the Spectrum, I have a nice collection of games, probably about 60, mostly the ones I had as a kid. I have a few Spectrums in my collection, a ZX81, 48k (rubber key) and a 128k +2b. I mainly use the 48k as this was the one I had when I was young so has the most nostalgic memories for me.

kiwimike
Dare I mention the Vega+ ?! I was looking forward to seeing it emerge, but it's looking more unlikely as time passes. Otherwise, emulator is the only way I can remember the Spectrum. Or mag screenshots

stvd
My Spectrum usage is still regular via emulation. My PSP has Fuse-PSP and the original Xbox has both Fuse and DidntXSpectrum. Both are great, but I do still prefer to play using the keyboard so its via ZXspin on my laptop or Spectaculator on my desktop.

DRS
I enjoy my Spectrum every morning as it sits just above the loo – a zombie-fleshed 48K model signed by Matthew Smith and Rick Dickinson – and always puts a smile on my face.

PostieDoc
I have a mint-condition Spectrum +3 with a DivMMC slotted in the back, near enough every game ready to play. I just prefer playing on the original hardware, there is something magical about it.

malczx
I travel back to my beloved Spectrum days using different types of emulation – GameBase on my Windows laptop, then the Recreated Bluetooth ZX Spectrum on my tablet, and finally for that really portable option ZXDS on my Nintendo DS XL!

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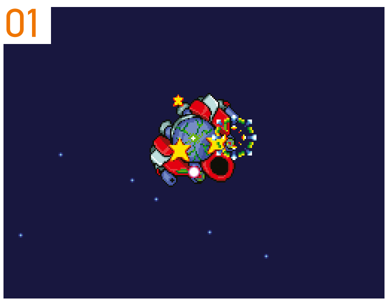
ENDGAME



STAR PARODIER

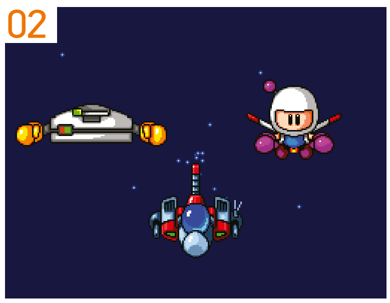
» With three successful HuCard entries in the Star Soldier series, PC Engine fans must have been eagerly anticipating what Hudson Soft would do with the Super CD-ROM format – and we're guessing that few would have expected Star Parodier, a cute-'em-up that was to Star Soldier what Parodius is to Gradius. Still, it turned out to be a fantastic game in its own right, so let's spoil it and skip to the end...

01



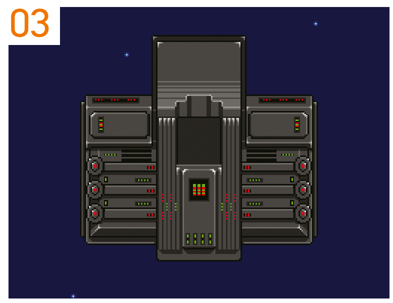
» We're not really sure what your mission is in *Star Parodier,* really. You just shoot a bunch of stuff and then shoot some more. Regardless, with the final boss destroyed your mission – whatever exactly that entailed – is complete at last.

02



» Here are our heroes. The Paro Ceaser has come from *Star Soldier,* which makes sense. Bomberman has come from, well... *Bomberman.* Then there's a PC Engine, which shoots HuCards and CDs. They're all off home post-mission.

03



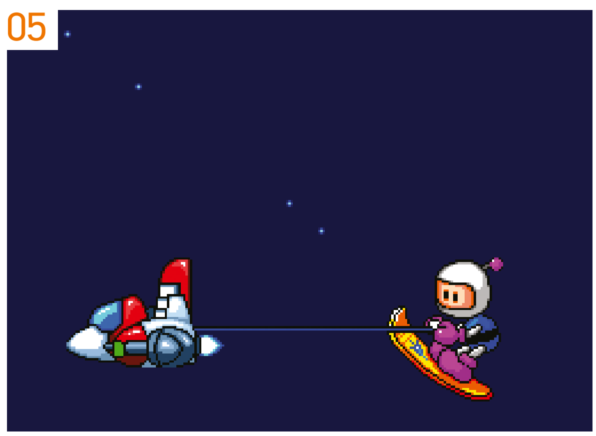
» And this is home, apparently – a gigantic flippin' Supergrafx, which is the sort of thing you'd really expect Hudson to be less proud of given that the gaming market thoroughly rejected the console. This one's even got lights and stuff.

04

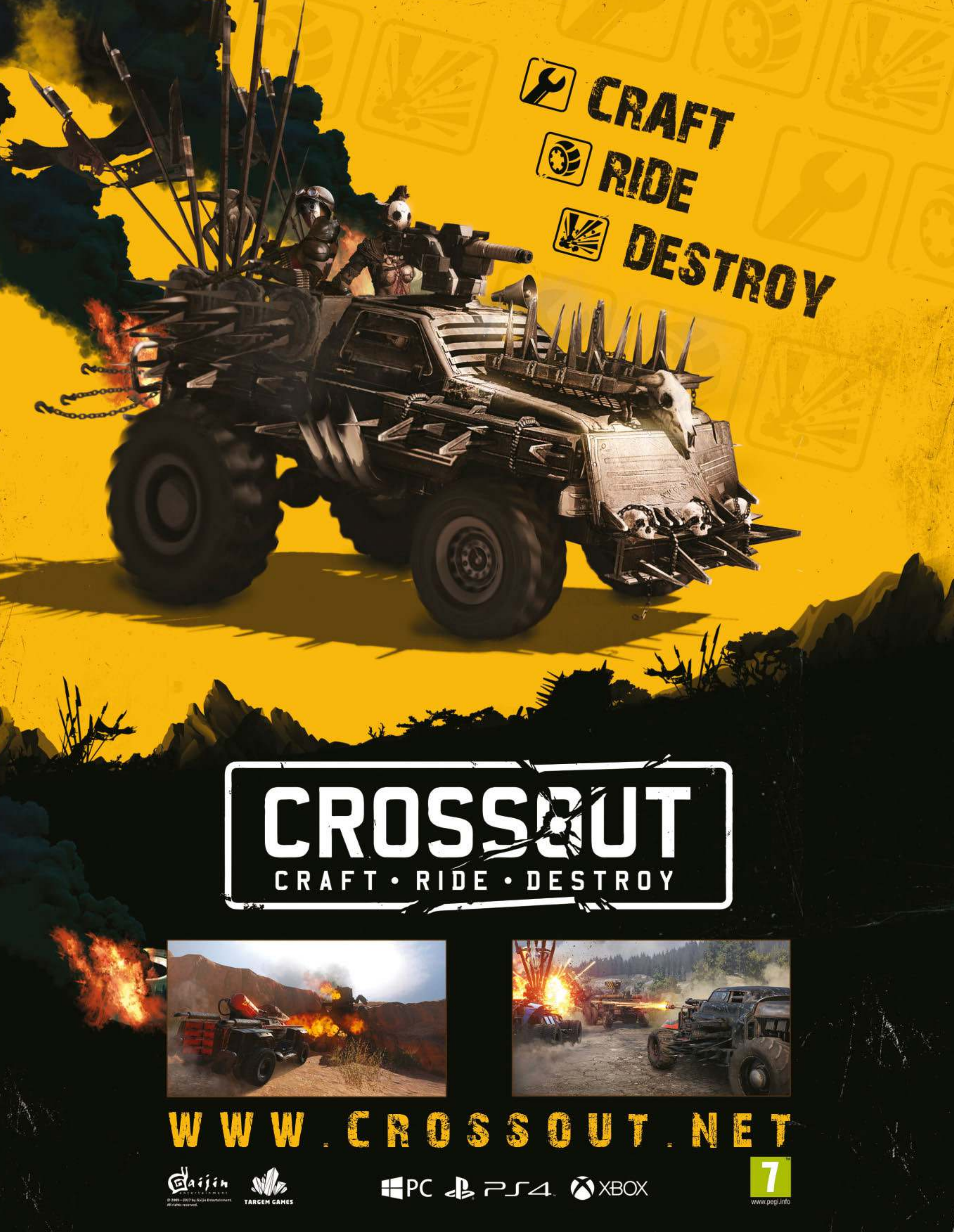


» As they approach the Supergrafx our heroes are greeted by other ships, including the PC Engine Shuttle (again with the failed hardware?) and a selection of men who utilise bombs. They playfully frolic, now that they've finished doing whatever it was they were meant to have done. Something about shooting?

05



» With a complete disregard for sense, Bomberman decides to cut loose and try wakeboarding on the back of Star Ceaser. It'd go just as well without the board, given that there's no water or indeed gravity here, but Bomberman doesn't care. He's bored with your silly concept of physics, okay?


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ISSUE 48

OCTOBER 2017



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Next issue on sale:
That's a good one! Uh, let's say sometime in 2042 (if we're still alive).

Super Play has been resurrected from the home of *Edge*, *GamesMaster*, *games™*, *Official PlayStation Magazine*, *Official Xbox Magazine*, *PC Gamer* and, of course, the balloon-poppingly fine *Retro Gamer*.

SUBSCRIPTIONS For fairly obvious reasons, you can no longer get *Super Play* delivered each month. For some hugely scrumptious alternatives, see p50.

Do not call *Super Play* on Thursdays, and certainly not between the hours of 2pm and 6pm! NEVER call for SNES Mini stock advice! Actually, look, please don't call at all, because once this issue's complete we won't be here, just like Consumer Recreation Services from out of the Michael Douglas movie The Game. But you can contact Nintendo's customer support, whose number is +44 (0)345 60 50 247.

Thank you, E and K, for your help, and C for pressing the button.

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SUPER PLAY EDITORIAL

FROM THE BIG CHAIR

Our full contents listing starts just over the page

I'm not really the sort of person to pre-order things on the Internet, but when Nintendo announced the Classic Mini: SNES I buckled like a white plastic chair at a You've Been Framed barbecue.

Scrabbling to Amazon, I made my reservation. Ten minutes later, I was there again, having decided to order another one to give as a Christmas gift, only to be rejected because the entire allocation had been hoovered up in a flash. Who knew that everyone loves this console as much as I do? Not Nintendo, presumably.

I'd played games on consoles since their very early days, but hardware such as the NES and Master System felt like dress rehearsals for the SNES. I'd enjoyed Mega Drive games such as *Thunder Force III* and *The Revenge Of Shinobi* well enough, but I connected with *Super Metroid*, *A Link To The Past* and *Super Mario World* on a different, deeper level. And then there was *Street Fighter II Turbo* and *Yoshi's Island* and… well, if you were there, you know what I'm on about.

I really liked *Super Play*, too, and not only because the subscription deal offered readers a copy of Akira. (On VHS! Hey, this was 1992.) I liked it so much, in fact, that one day I called the magazine's editor to ask about possible job openings. (Thank goodness this was in the days before he could have easily ignored an email from me.) And so it was that I joined the team. I had very little idea about what I was doing, but I wasn't short on enthusiasm – which came in pretty handy given the apparently never-ending stream of crappy Japanese imports no one else wanted to review.

Back then, I got away with it because I was among a group of very patient and extremely talented folk, and in resurrecting *Super Play* for this one-off special edition I thought it'd be sensible to follow the same approach. So I got in touch with former *Super Play* staff Jason Brookes, Jonathan Davies, Zy Nicholson and Wil Overton to invite them back aboard, along with longtime Nintendo experts including Mark Green, Damien McFerran, Jeremy Parish and Chris Schilling. The plan, in part: let's re-review 20 of the Mini-bound SNES games in the direct glare of 2017, over 20 years on. That all of them were so enthusiastic about the idea tells us a good deal about what this amazing little console represents.

Tony Mott
Editor



Super Play

CONT

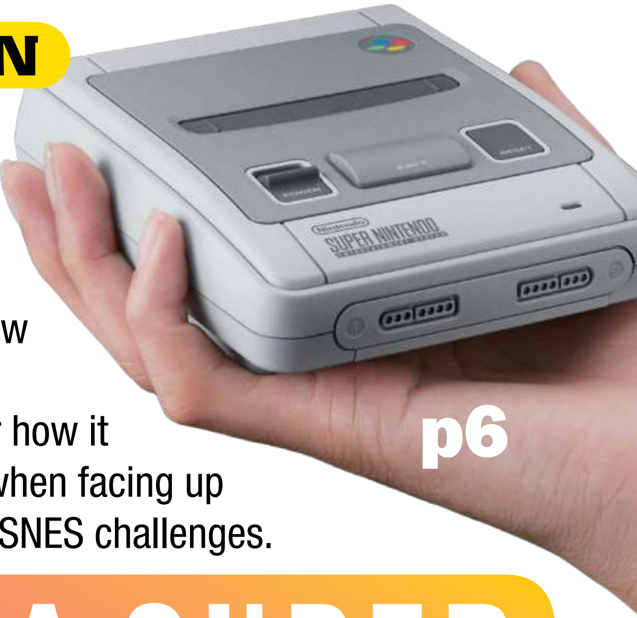
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HANDS-ON

SNES MINI



We put Nintendo's new hardware through its paces – and discover how it greases the wheels when facing up to even the toughest SNES challenges.

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A SUPER HISTORY

Jason Brookes, who was behind the scenes for the launch of *Super Play* in 1992, chronicles the beginnings of the SNES story, and explains the ingredients of the very magazine in your hands.

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STAR FOX 2

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No review for McCloud's return? Blame the choke hold of an NDA. Here's the next best thing.





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Dylan Cuthbert INTERVIEW

If we can't get too deep into the nitty-gritty of how *Star Fox 2* plays out, we can at least get the inside story from one of its developers. Look, here he is right now.



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SECRET OF MANA

Once more into Square's verdant action RPG, with its unique three-player support. If, er, you can work out how to use this unique feature on the two-controllers-only SNES Mini, by all means let us know.

SUPER METROID

Jeremy Parish returns to the planet Zebes to dig below the surface of one of the most critically acclaimed SNES games of them all. With series fans awaiting the arrival of Switch tour de force *Metroid Prime 4*, can this resolutely 2D action adventure still cut the mustard? (Spoiler: OH YES.)



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SUPER

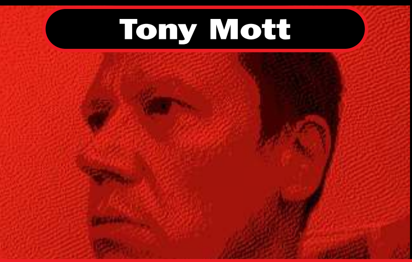
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SUPER PLAY PROFILES

This month, we're finishing some sentences.

Tony Mott



This picture: "Is how I'd appear on a Virtual Boy, according to the excellent *Retro Specs* photo app."
Since the old *Super Play* days, I have: "Helped to make a *lot* of videogame magazines. Hey, let's hear it for all those trees."
The best SNES game is: "The best 2D Mario game – *SMW*."

Jonathan Davies



This picture: "Is how I look nowadays, apparently."
Since the old *Super Play* days, I have: "Mainly been preoccupied with the old *Super Play* days. It's been difficult to move on."
The best SNES game is: "*A Link To The Past*, the epic template for every *Zelda* game since."

Jason Brookes



This picture: "Is Wil's cute 'Gamefreak' caricature of me from *Super Play*'s early days."
Since the old *Super Play* days, I have: "Edited *Edge* (the early years) and lived in California, writing for Japanese magazines."
The best SNES game is: "Hmmm... *Super Mario Kart*?"

Zy Nicholson



This picture: "Suggests I am Cactuar – elusive and bristly."
Since the old *Super Play* days, I have: "You've lost me – the mag closed? Then where's the copy I've been filing been going for 20 years? You *moved office*?"
The best SNES game is: "If it's Friday, then *A Link To The Past*."

Wil Overton



This picture: "Is the best I can do nowadays – and it isn't even my final form. I know!"
Since the old *Super Play* days, I have: "Drawn many silly pictures for many people silly enough to ask me."
The best SNES game is: "*FFVI*. Especially the opera bit."

NINTENDO REWINDS THE CLOCK

A repackaged SNES just in time for the return of *Super Play*? Now that's what you call convenient.



When we took early delivery of SNES Mini hardware from Nintendo, we were expecting it to function in much the same way as last year's NES-based predecessor. And sure enough, upon powering it up we were greeted with a familiar user interface, with a horizontal arrangement of 21 SNES game boxes that can be scrolled through against a pixelly SNES as the backdrop. However, in poking around with the console's Suspend Point feature – allowing you to save your game at any time, just as with the NES version – we noticed a new option: Rewind. "That's nice," we thought. "It saves video clips, just like modern consoles." But these aren't video clips: rather, the console is saving your gameplay, and you can jump into a sequence to pick it up again at any point. The prospect of saving progress wherever we like had already given us new hope in the face of returning to the diamond-hard *Super Ghouls'n Ghosts*, but this is a game-changer on another level.

The downside is that you can only access the Rewind feature from the home screen, which means reaching for the console's Reset button. And this is potentially farther away than it was with the NES Mini given that, at about 5ft, SNES Mini controller cables are longer than the 3ft '8-bit' versions. On the plus side, the hardware is packaged with two controllers this time around, a fine consideration given the presence of *Super Mario Kart* and *Street Fighter II Turbo*, which obviously gain a vital extra dimension when you're playing next to a fellow human begging to be crushed into fine dust repeatedly.

EXPRESS

NINTENDO MINI NEWS NETWORK SUPER NINTENDO MINI

Below: The user interface follows the format used by the NES Mini, right down to display modes, offering 'Pixel Perfect' (square pixels), '4:3' (pictured below centre – the best option, in our opinion) and 'CRT Filter' (bottom).













Main: Build quality on the new console is as sturdy as expected. Note: one of these buttons does not do anything, no mattter how many times you press it. Can you guess which?

Inset: Video output is handled by HDMI, and the console is powered via the supplied Micro USB cable, which can be simply fed into your TV (so long as it has a USB port, obviously). As with the NES Mini, a dedicated power adaptor is not included.

Above left: The 'tongue' that must be flicked out in order to insert controllers is the one design aspect that feels a little off. Best keep it in when you're not playing, to maintain that authentic SNES aesthetic.

Above centre left: The amount of action you're allowed to skip through with the Rewind feature depends on how long you've been playing a game. The timer seems to allow for up to an hour's worth of stored play, but we haven't pushed it near to that during our time with the hardware so far.

Crucially, the controller is based on the Wii Super NES Classic Controller (a Club Nintendo limited edition, once upon a time), which is modelled on the original hardware and is about as faithful as these things get. Twenty-seven years on, the design sits as comfortably in the hands as ever, its D-pad and buttons as winningly precise as they need to be in the face of something like *Contra III*, which hands out kickings as ruthlessly as it always has, thanks to what feels like perfect emulation (right down to slowdown when the action heats up), as is the case across all of the 21 games on offer.

LET'S SEE THOSE PIXELS

If what's in your hands feels timeless, it's not quite so straightforward up there on the screen. Running the hardware on a modern LCD display via its HDMI video output leaves no hiding place for anything that was designed with the bleeding glow of phosphor-based CRT screens in mind. The anti-aliasing used in some games' typography, for example, feels messy when exposed like this, while the Ape logo at the beginning of *EarthBound* simply looks like a splodge. Meanwhile, *Donkey Kong Country*'s famed 'ACM' visuals lose some of their lustre in this format, while *Secret Of Mana*'s forest-scene intro, once so awe-inspiring, is a bit of a smudgy mess. At times you'll swear that these aren't the graphics that dazzled you all those years ago, but of course they are, just viewed through a different lens. A 'CRT Filter' display option smooths things out and emulates scanlines, but if you're the sort of person who uses such modes, you'll yearn for a variety of treatments rather than the sole method on offer here.

Younger players may find some of these games' UI foibles a little weird, too. There is no way, for instance, of remapping *Super Metroid*'s controls from within the game itself, requiring a reset back to the title screen. But this has nothing to do with the SNES Mini hardware, and it's not too difficult to digest in the context of something as majestic as Yoshio Sakamoto's classic.

And it's to be expected. The SNES Mini sees us travelling back in time to a momentous period in videogames' evolution. That each individual stop along the way allows us to rewind time within it, again and again, is a high-fivingly appropriate bonus.

Ultimately, the console feels like the sweet spot between the NES Mini, which was a fun diversion but with too few games capable of holding your attention for long, and the rumoured N64 edition, whose controllers would surely make it more expensive, and whose visuals might, in a weird way, feel more dated than those on display in this 16-bit emulation. Given that, for £70, you're getting a fat helping of All-Time Hall Of Famers alongside plenty of games that simply put a big smile on your face, it's impossible not to recommend.











THE MACHINE AND THE MAGAZINE

One of *Super Play*'s launch team looks at the birth of a new type of videogame console – and the creation of a magazine dedicated to celebrating it. By Jason Brookes

Super Famicom, Super Nintendo, *Super Play*: the superlative was massively overused, but perhaps deservedly so. Nintendo's 16-bit console *was* super. It was almost perfect.

Amazingly, it's 25 years since *Super Play* was launched and it's so gratifying that, like the console, the magazine is still fondly remembered by readers. The launch of the SFC/SNES was clearly a special and unique time for the gaming world, and its profound impact on game design and innovation can still be felt today – many key game designers citing the console and its games as having been catalysts for their own creativity.

But the seeds of 16-bit success didn't sprout from nowhere. They evolved from the NES/Famicom – a machine that ultimately muscled its way into swathes of Japanese, American and (to a lesser extent) European households during the 1980s. The NES quickly became the backbone of the 8-bit console era – bridging the primordial years of home 'edutainment' computers and early consoles, to the parting shots of more advanced 8-bit gaming tech later on.

It was simple, functional and ubiquitous, thriving on a growing library of abundant, occasionally outstanding software from Nintendo's Kyoto in-house teams, and from talented developers locked into restrictive licensing agreements. This throttling of the competition enabled Nintendo to own an astonishing two thirds of the US console market within two years of the late-'85 NES launch. In Japan it acquired an even bigger share, where, by the middle of 1985, close to four million Famicom units had shifted in the two years since its debut.

But by the second half of the decade, as powerful 16-bit graphics were infiltrating worldwide arcades and revolutionising home computer gaming, an expiry date for 8-bit console gaming loomed on the horizon. The inevitable leap to 16-bit would be a decision not taken lightly by Nintendo, though.

Closely guarding its core business – an installed base of 8-bit machines which would eventually reach a staggering 61 million units – the company deliberately held off announcing the Super Famicom's development in Japan until November 1988. By then, NEC had already sold close to a million of its tiny but formidable PC Engines in just a year, delivering a machine boasting near-pixel-perfect conversions of modern arcade machines such as *R-Type* and *Galaga '88*. Meanwhile, Sega's 16-bit Mega Drive had also just arrived in Japan with its own ambitions. Both NEC and Sega succeeded in attracting stellar support from key arcade developers previously tied to Nintendo.

Ironically, though, tougher new competition from its rivals likely spurred the Kyoto old master to pitch things exactly right as it refined prototypes of its world-beating console. It announced the 16-bit Nintendo would include a revolutionary joypad design with four – instead of the NES's two – main gameplay buttons, but also twin shoulder buttons to boot. Both were features that would become standardised on future consoles.



Top left: The original PAL SNES console with its new, condensed brother.

Inset: Early artist impressions of what Nintendo's 16-bit console would look like. Yikes.

Above: *Area 88*, *Gradius III* and *Final Fight* – early SFC releases that reflected the expectations of the early '90s, bringing coin-op action into the home.





Left: Just two games arrived with the Super Famicom when it launched on 21 November 1990: the mighty *Super Mario World* and the futuristically styled Mode 7 showcase *Z-Fero*.





It also revealed the machine would be powered by an array of custom processing units enabling big sprites, powerful scrolling capabilities and crystal-clear eight-channel stereo sound – the latter courtesy of a Sony-designed chip. Eight-bit colour layering would create sophisticated lighting and translucency effects, and its masterstroke – ultra-smooth background rotation and zooming via its lauded Mode 7 – was admirably showcased by early versions of *F-Zero* and *Pilotwings*.

It's arguable that the inclusion of a critically underpowered 3.58MHz CPU (initially chosen as a way to possibly retain backwards compatibility with the Famicom) was the only suspect move in the whole plan. Worryingly for players, it caused early sprite-based shooters to chug embarrassingly – before programmers gradually figured out the console's nuances.

In the lead-up to launch, Nintendo woefully underestimated demand, and 1.2 million pre-orders remained unfulfilled for months

Closer to launch, as more details were revealed, it became clear that everything from the new machine's sleek industrial design, to the colourful game packaging, to the inner hardware itself seemed utterly on point. This, combined with Nintendo's existing market share, worldwide infrastructure, and relatively technically friendly developer tools, naturally made the new format a shoe-in for existing developers such as JRPG heavy hitters Square and Enix, as well as arcade giants Konami, Namco, Taito and Capcom.

And so, on 21 November 1990 – exactly two years to the day from its initial announcement – a modest 300,000 Super Famicoms were shipped out in a Yakuza-thwarting overnight delivery mission dubbed 'Operation Midnight Shipping'. Huge fleets of trucks drove through the night from Nintendo's Kyoto warehouse delivering the machine and its only two available games (*Super Mario World* and *F-Zero*) to key stores over Japan.

Within a few weeks, just prior to Christmas, a wave of strong supporting software arrived in the form of *Actraiser*, *Gradius III*, *Final Fight* and *Pilotwings*.

But a glitch remained: in the lead-up to launch, Nintendo had woefully underestimated demand for its new machine, and 1.2 million pre-orders remained unfulfilled for months. However, by spring, supply problems had been rectified, and the company had already shifted an impressive two million units.

Back in the UK (and Europe), where 16-bit computer gaming had been on a roll since the late '80s, the official UK console market was – certainly in contrast to the US and Japan – a depressing backwater suffering hugely delayed releases and puny selections of software. It was under such conditions that a proliferation of underground import gaming stores sprung up from 1988 onwards (initially selling mostly Japanese PC Engines and Mega Drives) to a more impassioned breed of player.

IMPORT ARMY

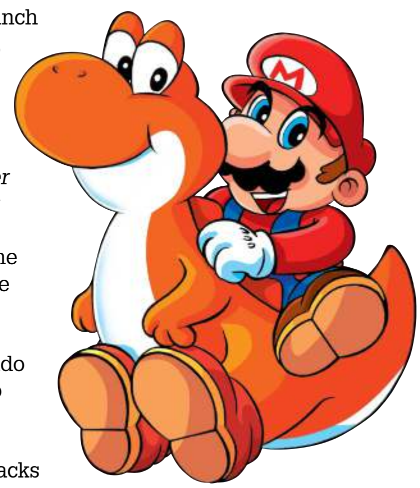
Unofficial 'grey'-imported Super Famicoms started to trickle into the UK within a month or so of the hardware's Japanese launch. This was propelled by a strong UK pound against the Japanese yen and fairly quickly early adopters were able pick up a 60Hz, full-screen RGB SCART-converted console for around £250–300 including a game (in Japan, the ¥25,000 price tag of the machine with just one controller had equated to roughly just £100).

The UK import scene continued to flourish – particularly after the American Super Nintendo launch in August 1991. US machines were similarly cheap to import, and had the advantage of not needing a cartridge adaptor to play Japanese games. Eagerly awaited American (English-language) versions of top Japanese games arrived to keep players entranced, such as *Super Castlevania IV*, *Super Ghouls'n Ghosts*, *Legend Of The Mystical Ninja* and of course the feather in Nintendo's cap, *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past*. The only real issue with the American machine? It required you to stomach a bizarre, boxy, purple-buttoned redesign.

By the time the official UK launch finally rolled around in spring '92, it's hard to estimate how many imported consoles and games were already being played here, but it was considerable, and naturally became a factor in *Super Play*'s Japan-leaning and globally aware approach. Unfortunately, the PAL technical limitations of the UK machine only compounded the import issue for Nintendo UK, elevating the status of foreign machines further. At least Nintendo UK/Europe had the good sense to retain the Japanese machine's perfectly realised design.

Despite the inevitable drawbacks with the UK machine (admittedly, um, not helped by *Super Play* moaning about it), the differences were obviously mostly apparent when comparing systems side by side. Besides, the average consumer didn't want to deal with buying weird adaptors or expensive SCART TVs – for most people, the UK console was still an amazing machine with a great future ahead of it.

Above: Nintendo Of America designer Lance Barr came up with a new design for the US version of the SNES, which launched 23 August 1991. More angular, with purple accents? Flippin' heck.





Left: The expansion port on the base of the SNES was included with various add-ons in mind. A CD module was cancelled, but the Satellaview modem made it to the Japanese market, allowing players to download software.



Above: Wil Overton created the art for every cover in *Super Play*'s original 47-issue run, painting the earlier examples by hand and using digital tools to add backgrounds and other details. And now you can own the original art used as the basis for issue 25! (See p45.)





Above: It didn't take long for the Super Nintendo game library to grow in ambition beyond arcade conversions. *Final Fantasy IV* (released in the US as *FFII*) and a fine version of *SimCity* both arrived on Japanese shelves in 1991.



PLAY TIME

No matter what territory you were playing one in, there were just so many original and cool ideas packed into the 16-bit Nintendo and its software that it infused a sense of wonder, excitement – and happiness – into gaming life that is still felt to this day. Launching *Super Play* was a place for us to express all this – a monthly meet-up for a passionate, devoted readership that would feel proud to own such a landmark machine, and be excited every month for what was to come next.

Personally speaking, it was a dream come true for a Super Nintendo nut like me to be part of the launch. *Super Play*'s parent company, Future Publishing, was in those days headed up by founder and visionary entrepreneur Chris Anderson (who now owns and runs the TED Conference in California), and was full of passionate young hobbyists, writers and designers launching magazines in all sorts of fields. Most of all, there was an overwhelming sense of fun and friendship at the company that really blurred the lines between people's day jobs and their social lives. Having about ten pubs on our doorstep didn't hurt much, either.

The production cycle of the first issue of *Super Play* began in a tiny, top-floor office during a stiflingly hot summer in 1992, under the direction of Matt Bielby, former launch editor of *Amiga Power* and *Your Sinclair*. Matt loved magazines of all kinds and was full of fresh ideas to make *Super Play* feel more like a club than a magazine. He was also a closet anime fan as well as a game player. His old mate Jonathan Davies was simply a great writer to have on board, as well as a long-time freelance contributor to many of Future's successful videogame magazines.

Personally, I was crazy about Japan and import gaming, and an avid reader of videogame mags over the years. I remember really wanting *Super Play* to be the kind of magazine I would have been excited to buy – warm, friendly and funny, but laser-focused on the coolest Super Nintendo happenings.

I helped refine our Super Express news section with its monthly lists of international game charts and release dates, as well as first glimpses of hot new games – often shamelessly scanned out of Japanese magazines (and typically on the magazine's deadline, to the annoyance of the art staff, Tracey and Jez). In between two-player games of *Mario Kart* or *Rampart* with Jonathan I'd be updating What Cart?, our exhaustive international catalogue of games, or the Game Freak Q&A pages, which unleashed my inner nerd to run rampant responding to reader questions about SCART, 60Hz and anything concerning 'frames per second'.

A smart move by Matt was hunting down a talented cover artist in the form of Wil Overton (who, naturally enough, is the artist behind this issue's cover, too). Combined with our cool, futuristic logo by Jez Bridgeman (partly ripped off, I think, from *Newtype* anime magazine), the covers, perhaps more than any other aspect of the mag, helped define the unique tone of *Super Play* from the outset. Every month, when a large, flat art package was delivered to the office, we all excitedly crowded around the table to see what treat Wil had cooked up for the new issue.

> **Super Play was a monthly meet-up for a passionate, devoted readership that would feel proud to own such a landmark machine**

After months of writing reviews of hot (and not so hot) new games, and articles about game music, JRPGs and exciting SNES CD-ROM accessories that would never happen, I reluctantly left *Super Play* after just nine or ten issues to join the team launching *Edge*. But thankfully a succession of great writing and editing talents such as Zy Nicholson, Tony Mott, James Leach and Alison Harper continued to keep the *Super Play* flame alive for almost another 40 issues.

I still get a warm, nostalgic glow when I see the magazine's early covers – or indeed the console's quirky black logo with its primary colour blobs (Sony Trinitron, anyone?). And, given a chance, preferably over a pint, I will happily wax lyrical about the music in *Secret Of Mana*, the calming ambience of *Pilotwings*, and the brilliant fun we had playing inter-office *Street Fighter II* and *Super Mario Kart* challenges. Those were indeed *super* days.

MERCHANDISE OF THE MONTH





SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV VINYL SOUNDTRACK

Publisher: Mondotees.com **Price:** $30

We've been looking forward to this ever since Mondo announced plans to team up with Konami to release some of its classic game soundtracks on vinyl. Now it's here – and it delivers. Before we get too gushy, though, let's look at the artwork chosen for the double-disc set's sleeve. While JenoLab's art isn't *bad* – and the gatefold sleeve opens out to reveal a fine rendering of the game's world – it lacks the impact of Paul Mann's amazing sleeve art for Mondo's *Contra III* release, and does little to capture the atmosphere of the game. What's particularly odd is that better art is used on the LPs' central labels.

Fortunately, the work of composers Masanori Adachi and Taro Kudo has rarely sounded better. Suitably bassy where it needs to be and structured to constantly show off the soundtrack's excellent use of stereo, Mondo has created a fantastic set – on 180-gram vinyl in a choice of finishes – that showcases the 29 remastered tracks to great effect. As magnificent as the game it's based upon.

BOOK





Do we have room to mention *The Unofficial SNES/Super Famicom: A Visual Compendium*? Just. From **www.bitmapbooks.co.uk**, it's due in December, so possibly one for the old Santa list.

FANHUNTER

YOU'LL FIND NO FINER FANZINES

By Chris Schilling

***Super Play* is back, but only for a month. Once it melts into the ether again, to be spoken of only in doleful folk song and expletive-laced forum threads, you might consider the following packages of Nintendo-related words instead.**



SWITCH PLAYER

Entirely focused on Nintendo's newest console, the 60-page *Switch Player* can be read online, or for a mere $6 you can get a print version delivered to your doorstep. Issue #5 includes an extensive reaction to E3 (including responses from Actual Journos) with a clutch of hands-on previews and observations besides. There's a fun developer interview with The Dangerous Kitchen, creator of riotous four-player party game *De Mambo*, while a detailed appraisal of *ARMS* heads up a substantial review section. Opinions come from a host of well-picked contributors: Serebii's Joe Merrick talks about all things Pokémon, while Darren Kerwin, community manager at *Metroid* fansite Shinesparkers, speculates about what we can expect from *Metroid Prime 4*. Finally, there's a piece on that awkward moment when Nintendo retires the feature that inspired your community name, as Streetpass UK becomes Nintendo Players UK.

You can cast your eyes over *Switch Player* for free at **issuu.com/switchplayer**, while UK readers can pay $6 to the magazine's Patreon – **www.patreon.com/switchplayer** – to get a print version delivered.



HYPER PLAY RPG

Now this is a *proper* fanzine, covering "all retro RPGs and any-bit Nintendo" – a Venn diagram that's probably just one circle. Issue one features a mildly controversial *Xenoblade Chronicles* review ("flirts with greatness, but never quite seals the deal"), a laudably thorough guide to reproduction boxes, manuals and maps, and an entertaining piece on "the ultimate retro arcade experience" at Barcade Brooklyn. Issue two, meanwhile, features a delightful full-colour *Secret Of Mana 2* cover (by Wil Overton, no less), alongside an apparently "small" review of *Super Mario RPG*, which at five pages of solid text is anything but. A detailed appraisal of *Terranigma* restates the team's commitment, explaining that they replay games in their entirety before committing opinion to paper. Sure, you'll find online fanzines with better production values, but press your nose to these pages and you can almost smell the blood, sweat and passion invested throughout.

You can grab individual issues of *HyperPlay RPG*, as well as discount bundles and an *Art Of RPGs* special issue, from **www.hyperplayrpg.com**. The team will ship overseas, too, so it's not just for UK readers.



NINTENDO FORCE

This is a slick, smartly designed and expensive-feeling mag – as you'd hope with an issue budget of $16k. The theme of its post-E3 issue #29 is 'surprise', with a feature taking a look at Nintendo's most unexpected announcements, from Pit's revival in *Kid Icarus: Uprising* right up to *Odyssey*'s T-Rex reveal. It's clearly editor-in-chief Lucas M Thomas' baby, and he gets the lion's share of the editorial, but he's also corralled a fine group of Nintendo-centric bloggers and enthusiast writers. A piece on the forthcoming Classic Game Selection is noteworthy for the excellent 'NESFlix' pun, which is slightly spoiled by an elaborate explanation of the joke. Elsewhere, comic strips and retro features sit alongside reports on BitSummit in Japan, while the Collector's Corner page comes from the man who holds the world record for the largest hoard of Nintendo memorabilia. Now *there's* someone who knows what he's talking about.

Issues and bundles of *Nintendo Force* can be purchased at **www.nintendoforcemagazine.com**. Digital issues are naturally the cheapest option; as a US-based mag, it costs $15.99 to have a print edition shipped to the UK.

STAR FOX 2

Ambitious and unusual, the long-awaited sequel is almost ready for launch. Time for a preview flight…







Visually, *Star Fox 2* is heavier on textures than the original game, but its frame rate can still judder like it's about to conk out.

Star Fox 2 hasn't just been delayed – it's been comatose. Twenty-two years later than planned, the game is waking to meet five different children in an unfamiliar world. Like the branching routes in the original, this feels like an illicit glimpse at a path Nintendo never took; *Sliding Doors* with a human-like fox replacing Gwyneth Paltrow.

It's a strange game, short and subdued, and lacking the opening thrust of the original. Andross is back, Corneria is in danger. Instead of thundering down a tunnel to a Koji Kondo soundtrack, however, you're met with a real-time tactical map and strict choices. Do you take out the ballistic missiles headed for your home planet? Or do you push forward and infiltrate the carriers launching waves of aircraft? The answer is 'both, eventually', but the initial decision is a bit intimidating.

You can take on faster enemy units in first-person dogfights, which see you destroying missiles or scrapping with pilots from the Star Wolf squadron, or push on to invade static targets. You can almost feel the game straining at the edges as it struggles to provide non-linear 3D environments that can be traversed in your transforming Arwings. The walker is a surprise – the controls are smart, and firepower feels meatier than the Arwing's flimsy blaster. It almost makes things *too* simple – if you're patient enough to waddle through a level, it removes the danger of barrel rolling into the scenery.

The choice and variety impress, then, but just as you begin to understand *Star Fox 2*, it ends. A shame, because once the systems begin to work in unison, there's a satisfying rhythm to its strategy. The brevity means that it suffers from comparisons to both the first title and the 3D games that followed, but it encourages replaying, to see how the war pans out according to different decisions.

There are more nourishing games in the SNES Mini line-up, but as a piece of Nintendo history, *Star Fox 2* is fascinating in its own right. And there's something noble about a creaky, grand old Nintendo series getting one last run. Its real moment may have passed, but let's be thankful that we get to play it at all.







Evil simian emperor Andross throws all sorts of hazards into the path of your Arwing, but *Star Fox 2* isn't especially difficult once you adjust to its foibles. If you can sail through the first game, you won't hit too many barriers here.

WING CHUM

Anthropomorphised wingmen are a staple of the original *Star Fox*, and the sequel takes things a step further. At the outset, you choose two pilots to help you save Corneria, swapping between them as necessary once the action begins. It's a second chance if your shields take a hammering and you can't get back to the mothership to recharge – or if you come a cropper.



Fox
The Ryu of furry pilots, Fox is the default choice but you don't have to pick him. Choose Slippy as your main man instead, and pretend you're playing *Star Frog*.



Falco
The second-best pilot in the team, and still the most arrogant, Falco is best remembered for complaining whenever you saved him from enemy fighters in the first game.



Peppy
The chipper bunny from *Star Fox* returns, teaming up with Slippy to form Team We'll Never Get Picked. His defence stats are great, but his face has 'victim' written all over it.



Slippy
Slippy pilots a defensive version of the Arwing, great for soaking up all the damage from constantly having enemies on your tail. Except that Slippy doesn't have a tail, obviously.



Miyu
Miyu is a tomboyish Lynx who flies a faster, lighter version of the standard Arwing. Pick her and she blows a kiss, which is a) a bit weird, and b) not very tomboyish.



Fay
At first glance you'd think that Fay was a sheep, not a dog, and you'd be almost right. A white sheep was seen in early screenshots of *Star Fox 2* – Fay replaced her later on.





Transforming from Arwing to walker sees the controls adapt accordingly: now, rather than performing barrel rolls, L and R rotate your stompy attack unit. In the absence of the full analogue control we're used to nowadays, it's an effective compromise.

FLIGHT ENTERTAINMENT

The walker isn't the only alternative mode of transport: now you don't even need to take the original Arwing into battle if you're not in the mood.



Arwing (piloted by Fox and Falco)
The standard Arwing, used by both Falco and Fox. It's almost exactly the same as in the first game and comes with moderate defensive capabilities plus three nova bombs, which will one-shot almost any enemy you fight.



Arwing Interceptor (Fay and Miyu)
This faster, lighter version is flown by Fay and Miyu, and comes with twin blasters along with the special ability to use a barrier for defence. It's a pretty flimsy ride, though, with the weakest shield of any of the three craft options.



Defense-Class Arwing (Slippy and Peppy)
The Arwing equivalent of a flying wardrobe, this Defence-Class is the slowest choice, but makes up for it by being particularly hardy. The Heart ability recharges your already-big shield, saving you a trip back to the mothership.

SUPER PLAY Interview

DYLAN CUTHBERT, Q-GAMES



Above: Today, Dylan Cuthbert runs Kyoto's Q-Games, creator of titles including the splendid *PixelJunk* series.



GETTING TECHNICAL WITH THE LEAD PROGRAMMER OF THE SEQUEL WE THOUGHT WE'D NEVER SEE

Stationed at Nintendo's Kyoto HQ in the early '90s, Dylan Cuthbert was at the heart of the company's move into 3D games. Having worked on innovative wireframe-3D Game Boy title *X*, released exclusively in Japan in 1992, and then the original *Star Fox*, which arrived on the SNES the following year, he moved on to the sequel – this issue's cover game. However, faced with the impending arrival of dedicated 3D hardware in the form of Sony's PlayStation, and chewing over the strategy for its own new console, the N64, Nintendo chose to shelve the 16-bit project. Now, 22 years on from the game's completion, *Star Fox 2* is ready to see the light of day, and Cuthbert is here to tell us the story behind its creation.

Let's start with the original *Star Fox*: what sort of technical issues did you run into?

The main technical limitation was only being able to draw in the format for background characters, and not the sprite format. The Super FX chip fixed that with an extra mapping mode, although we ended up not using it in the end, and it was used in *Yoshi's Island*. The other limitation was the transfer limit for getting data into video memory. On *Star Fox* it took three vblanks [vertical blanking intervals] – 20 frames per second – and on *Star Fox 2* I squeezed it to two vblanks with some extra-precise timings. Of course, the draw rate wasn't that high anyway, so it never really got a chance to run at 30fps, but at least the possibility was there!

How did you feel about producing a 3D polygon-based SNES game at that stage, knowing that the Nintendo 64 was just around the corner?

Well, at the point of *Star Fox 2* [starting development] there was still no news regarding the N64, or even the PlayStation for that matter. The N64 ended up launching a long time after my work on *Star Fox 2* finished. Nintendo had only started doing experiments using Silicon Graphics workstations – not with final N64 hardware – about a year before we finished up. The console seemed a long way away.

What we all didn't realise was that the PlayStation was going to launch at the end of 1994, and that shook everything up and created massive ripples in the industry.



Though it was originally due in 1995, the final version of *Star Fox 2* is dated 1996, the year of the N64's arrival.

What did the Super FX2 chip offer over the original hardware?
It ran at twice the speed and, as I say, it could render into the internal sprite format automatically, which was very useful for games that used the FX Chip in a hybrid kind of fashion. The original FX chip was meant to run at 21MHz, too, but because of some problems in the silicon they dropped it to half, and saved features for the next iteration.

We also added the ability to clip polygons along arbitrary planes, and I used this to create a fake Z-buffer on some of the stages – in a lava stage, for example, platforms sink in smoothly, without any flickering. It's a simple trick and obvious now but back then it was cutting-edge.

What were the biggest technical challenges with *Star Fox 2*?
Creating simple physics and decent collision detection for the platforming parts of the game. 3D platforming wasn't a thing at that time, and we faced all of the problems that later games would encounter, such as: how do we control the camera well? And the SNES controller didn't have analogue sticks, which was quite limiting for 3D character controls. In one of the arenas there's a big rotating tower with multiple platforms and you can jump between them, with momentum preserved. At the time I don't think any other game was doing that kind of thing, that '3D Mario' kind of play – we just did it with a transforming Arwing instead of a chubby Italian.

Did the semi-real-time aspects of the game cause any technical issues?
No, they were purely gameplay and regular solvable problems. We created over 100 different arenas that are randomly selected from for each mission you play, so each time you play again you get a different experience and different problems to solve.

What did you do to try to preserve a consistent frame rate?
I reworked the parallel nature of the engine completely for *Star Fox 2*, making sure that whatever could run in parallel with the FX Chip was running in parallel. The FX chip took hold of the ROM bus when it ran, but had no direct access to the RAM bus, so transferring code into RAM and working there was very efficient and wouldn't get blocked, which basically gave me a dual-core CPU.

Looking back, which technical achievement were you happiest with?
We ran out of DOS memory during development because our assembler tools weren't really built for such a large project. So in the middle of development, and with a very rudimentary – but quickly supplemented – knowledge of C, I wrote a linker in two weeks using Borland C that meant we could compile all our modules separately and combine them automatically in a final pass. I still don't know how I managed to pull that off, two to three months from finishing the game.

Apart from that, I'm quite proud of the path language because it helped fill out the game tremendously while taking a huge load of grunt work away from us [the programmers]. It let us focus on creating the more complex bosses and gave us the time to concentrate on making them interesting. The results speak for themselves, I think. I can't remember how many bosses there are – I think it might be about 15? They're all starkly different to each other too.



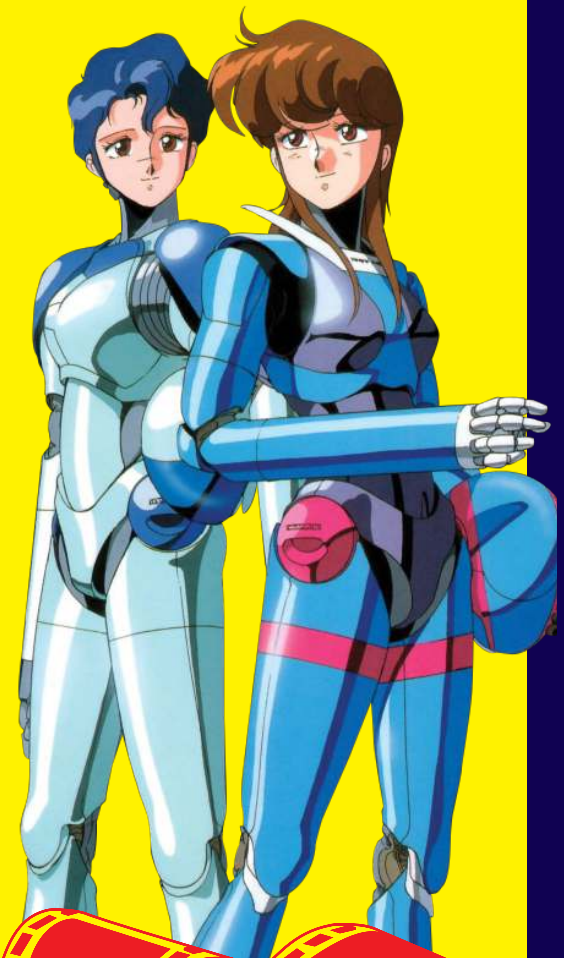


Top: *Star Fox 2*'s Super FX2 chip makes it easier to blend bitmap data with polygons to layer in explosion effects.

In terms of straining the hardware, how taxing was the planned two-player mode?
Well, the screen area was smaller but still, rendering two sets of everything was just a bit too taxing, really. We could get basic dogfights running and they were fun, but the screen was so small for each player, and we couldn't really fill out the graphics enough to make it truly interesting, so we concentrated on the one-player side of the game and dropped the two-player.

Some of the bosses are huge – how did you create them?
We had an 'alien strategy' macro language for machine code and a 'paths' scripted language with a byte interpreter for simpler stuff. The strategy macro language built upon years of Argonaut's internal engines and gave us huge flexibility for creating very complex bosses without worrying too much about crashing the entire system or screwing up one line of assembly – it basically hid the machine code and relied on a set of internal rules for safety. I created the paths language on top of that to enable [Katsuya] Eguchi and [Yoichi] Yamada, the two Nintendo-side directors on the game, to create most of the enemies and simple interactions by themselves, which really reduced the programmers' workload and also gave [Eguchi and Yamada] a lot of freedom in terms of creativity at the same time.

Looking back at what we did, it was very similar to MIT's Scratch! Just 20 years earlier, obviously, and on the SNES.





Above: The 1988 Akira movie is set in the dystopian, cyberpunk-themed Neo-Tokyo of 2019, which gives us just over a year to become psychic and lay waste to the Japanese capital.

Helen McCarthy looks at the roots of the British anime scene, and selects some vintage titles worth a rewatch

ANIME WORLD



Pronounced 'ah-nee-may'

ORIGIN STORIES



Above: AD Police Files is a spin-off from Bubblegum Crisis and acts as a prequel. Only three episodes were made.



Right: Sailor Moon is a franchise serialised across 18 manga volumes; it now spans movies, games and more.

The early 1990s: a tech desert by modern standards. No cheap broadband. Phones are huge. But there's one terrific piece of kit you can get – a videogame console. And in November 1992 Super Nintendo fans found a new addiction when *Super Play* hit newsagents' counters across the UK.

The magazine was a hit, not just because of its SNES coverage but because it acknowledged the origins of the SNES in Japanese pop culture and gave readers a framework for understanding the media-spanning Japanese entertainment business. Right from issue one, anime was part of that. I wrote about anime in *Super Play* for three years and enjoyed every minute of it, but anime hit the UK before *Super Play* was a twinkle in Future Publishing's eye.

In 1990, Japanese movie Akira was making waves worldwide. US distributor Streamline Pictures picked up the US cinema licence in 1989. The movie's explosive action, kinetic editing, contemporary themes and edgy script attracted attention because it was a cartoon, usually reserved for children.

Arthouse powerhouse ICA Projects gave Akira its UK theatrical release on



Above: Ghost In The Shell, known as Mobile Armoured Riot Police in Japan, tells the story of the counter-cyberterrorist Public Security Section 9, led by protagonist Major Motoko Kusanagi.

25 January 1991, but the British anime underground had already seen it. Akira was on the National Science Fiction Convention's first ever anime programme in April 1990, along with another 34 hours of Japanese animation.

So what else was around in Britain between 1990 and 1996, and how did early fans get their anime fix? To begin with, it was a mix of getting videotapes from contacts in the US, Japan and Europe, and handing over piles of cash to Japanese dealers for import tapes and magazines. In 1991, spurred by Akira's success, British companies began to release anime. Leading the pack was Island World Communications, which bought the UK rights to Akira late in 1991, then morphed into Manga Entertainment in 1993.

Most titles were aimed at teenage boys and students, viewed as anime's main market, and they were a mixed bag. Akira was the most expensive anime of its day, its technical accomplishments far beyond the TV and direct-to-video animation that made up most UK releases. Take Fist Of The North Star, Britain's follow-up release to Akira. A major franchise in Japan, its post-apocalyptic setting and constant combat echoed George Miller's 1979 movie Mad Max. Its stylised script and fighting style might appeal to console game fans, but its limited animation looked old-fashioned alongside Akira's. It wasn't just a matter of age or technology: UK-released science-fiction epics such as Big Wars, made for cinema in 1993, lacked Akira's spark.

Bubblegum Crisis (1987), released in the UK in 1992, was much more in tune with the British fanbase: four hot females with hi-tech body armour, a punky singer with a great motorbike, and a driving rock score. The Knight Sabers fought monsters in a post-apocalyptic Tokyo, and for a while they were pin-ups for a legion of British fanboys. The spin-off series AD Police (1990) was dubbed for UK release in 1994.

Note the timelag between Japanese and British release – almost unbelievable now. Being an anime fan back then was a waiting game, prolonged by corporate negotiations and financial difficulties as the new market fluctuated. We could see these shows in magazines but not buy them on VHS. Many titles fans craved from the late '80s, including Goku: Midnight Eye and Black Magic M66, didn't get UK releases for years. Cyberpunk criminal epic Cyber City Oedo 808, released in Japan in 1990, finally made it to the UK in 1995.

Anime aimed at a broader audience did even worse, despite being known and celebrated by UK fans. Ghost Sweeper Mikami, a 1993 TV series steeped in greed and gloss, didn't get here until 2004. Nadia: The Secret Of Blue Water, made by top studio Gainax in 1990, got a US release in 2001 but no UK release until 2015. Sailor Moon, the 1992 TV show that finally opened up anime for preteen and teenage girls, didn't get a UK release until 1999.

> 'Note the timelag between releases – almost unbelievable now.'

Even acclaimed genius Hayao Miyazaki wasn't seen on UK video, although 1989's Castle In The Sky showed up unheralded on daytime TV in the early '90s.

Those of us who could scrape the money together bought multi-region equipment to get our fix from the US and Japan. But some gems made it onto British screens. 1991's Roujin Z, based on a story by Akira's creator, hit Britain in 1994, breaking out of the teenage male niche: a funny, clever, poignant story about weaponising medical technology and old age. Then Manga Entertainment put its money into a 1995 co-production: Ghost In The Shell.

Now, anime is established enough to be licensed by Hollywood – though it all comes down to quality. In every artform, for every gem, there's a pile of dross. The UK anime market of the '90s was new, exciting and naïve. Yes, it was fun – but I wouldn't trade my fast broadband and wide choice of titles for a ticket back in time.



HOW TO WATCH '90s ANIME TODAY

Buying '90s anime is easy online, where you can find all the titles mentioned here, though not necessarily on Blu-ray. To stream them, you may have to hunt across several subscription services.



Akira, Ghost In The Shell, Castle In The Sky and Roujin Z are all currently available in the UK through the big online retailers. Nadia: The Secret Of Blue Water recently had a spiffy new Blu-ray release and is easily found on DVD. Sailor Moon is also easy to find in chunky box sets on UK or US DVD, as are Black Magic M-66, Bubblegum Crisis, AD Police, Ghost Sweeper Mikami and Cyber City Oedo 808 (UK version).

Fist Of The North Star is available as a US import online (and, if you're hooked on the retro fight style and have deep pockets, so is the TV version). Big Wars and the US version of Cyber City Oedo 808 can also be found on US DVD online. I drew a British blank everywhere but eBay on Goku: Midnight Eye DVDs, but you can still find them in smaller US webstores, although imports carry the usual shipping costs and can lead to arbitrary, and sometimes hefty, customs charges.



CONTRA III
THE ALIEN WARS



Tooled up and sporting vintage special forces bandanas, can Jimbo and Sully save the world from alien oblivion?





Two-player mode's heroes look bewilderingly similar. At times the stuff you have to do to survive seems incredible. But it's true!



UK Release

Game: Contra III: The Alien Wars
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house
Genre: Scrolling shoot-'em-up
Release: November 1992
Players: 1–2 simultaneously
ROM size: 8 Mbit

Left: The alien invasion is forecast to happen in 2636 – a date that's getting perilously close.



Above: Bosses are gigantic, relentless and super-tough to defeat – just like in real life.



As well as running and jumping, your character can clamber up walls.

MODE 7 TIPS

■ You've got two weapon slots to store power-ups. X switches between them, and holding L and R together gives you go-crazy dual-wield mode – a bit random but worth a punt in tight spots.
■ This is an example of a Konami game that doesn't respond to the Konami Code, and only imported Japanese versions support cheat modes, including Down, Down+Right, Right, Start on the title screen to unlock 30 precious lives.

If you die, you lose the weapon that's currently selected, so keep those guided missiles in reserve for boss battles.





GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?



I always knew they were only kidding when they said they were closing *Super Play* forever. And actually, the break has given me plenty of time to try to master this, one of the most challenging SNES games. Yet even after 25 years of practice, *Contra III* keeps getting the better of me. The pop-up gun turrets still catch me by surprise, and the Level Four boss (the one you tackle while hanging in mid-air from exploding missiles) seems borderline preposterous.

Even after all this time, the controls respond instantly, letting you duck, leap and swing from the scenery to avoid the relentless onslaught. Success is always attainable, but only through sheer hard work, mastering the skill of ducking under a bullet and then somersaulting over the head of the guy who fired it while dispatching him with a downward-aimed volley. The dazzlingly imaginative bosses demand analysis followed by exploitation of their weaknesses. There's no relying on luck here: this is all down to you.

Contra III was an early example of a genre that continues to evolve to this day, and inspired the likes of *Gunstar Heroes*, *Metal Slug* and, more recently, a host of indie tributes from *Mercenary Kings* to *Broforce*. Konami's SNES run-and-gunner stills shines today, and feels just about as fresh, tightly designed and expertly polished as the day I first played it. The two-player mode was even a hit with the Mini Davieses (the other thing I've been working on during *Super Play*'s temporary absence), who normally turn up their noses at anything that wasn't released within the past five minutes.

● Jonathan Davies

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
82%	86%	89%
GAMELIFE 81%	OVERALL SCORE:	89%

VERDICT: If you can master this, you can achieve anything. Uncompromising, inventive and an essential part of the SNES's generous library of action games.

ORIGINAL SCORE SP2 90%

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY



UK Release

Game: Donkey Kong Country
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Rare
Genre: Platform
Release: November 1994
Players: 1–2
ROM size: 32 Mbit

Diddy and uncle Donkey Kong control differently and have different moves – there's even pass-the-pad multi-player.

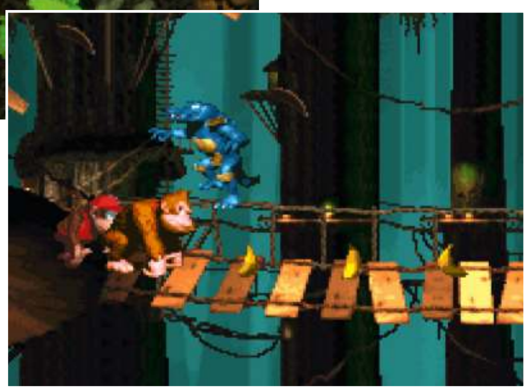
This was once one of the prettiest games in the world, but should we give a monkey's nowadays?





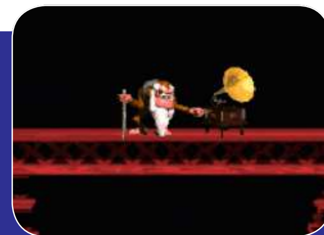
Above: It's a bit odd the animals are confined to crates when they aren't helping DK.

Left: There are secrets to be found in every single level.





MODE 7 TIPS



- There is a brilliant urban legend that Cranky Kong is the original Donkey Kong – that is, the one that fought Mario. We want to believe it. Evidence for this theory comes from the title sequence, which shows Cranky playing the original *DK* music on a gramophone.
- To start a game with 50 lives, head to the File Select screen, select Erase Game – it should flash – then press B, A, Right, Right, A, Left. Now choose a game.



Cranky Kong lives in a cabin and will give advice when asked. In later games he'll charge for this, but here it's free.

GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?



The second-best-selling SNES game of all time was the work not of Nintendo, but one of its closest and most-missed partners, Rareware, which in 1994 was right at the start of its Nintendo-backed golden age. Rare added a menagerie of monkey mates to the Kong family (Diddy, Cranky, Funky and Candy), conjuring up a verdant island and some amazing 3D-looking sprites using Silicon Graphics rendering technology.

Actually playing *Donkey Kong Country* again in 2017, however, raises the blood pressure to uncomfortable levels. Here are some of its sins: minecart levels (controversial opinion: minecart levels have NEVER been good), save points that force you to replay long streaks of difficult levels if you run out of lives, objects that disappear as soon as they go off-screen, and enemies with unpredictable movement patterns. In its favour are inventive gimmicks (such as traffic-light barrels that freeze enemies in place), lots of fun hidden bonus rooms, entertaining animal companions, and animations that still raise a smile.

And it's pretty, though not as mind-blowingly so as it appeared in 1994. Those big 3D-like sprites, detailed backdrops and fancy lighting effects make it difficult to see what's happening sometimes, and it can be tough to judge exactly whether you're going to land on an enemy's head or a few pixels off. Like plenty of tough platformers, there's a measure of trial and error to its challenge, but here, when you're tempted to snap the controller in frustration, it's the kind of irritating that leaves you wanting to conquer it rather than give up. Still, it's a good thing SNES controllers are durable.

It doesn't actually take very long to beat: 40 levels fly by pretty quickly, even when you're forced to backtrack to stockpile extra lives for a particularly annoying level. Five minutes after we'd turned it off in a huff, it was inviting us back in.

● Keza MacDonald

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
90%	88%	75%
GAMELIFE 60%	OVERALL SCORE:	77%

VERDICT: *Donkey Kong Country* is a classic example of style over substance, but it's still fun enough to justify a place in the Mini line-up.

ORIGINAL SCORE SP27 90%

EARTHBOUND

Is this off-the-wall adventure from Ape and HAL still the Mother of all JRPGs?

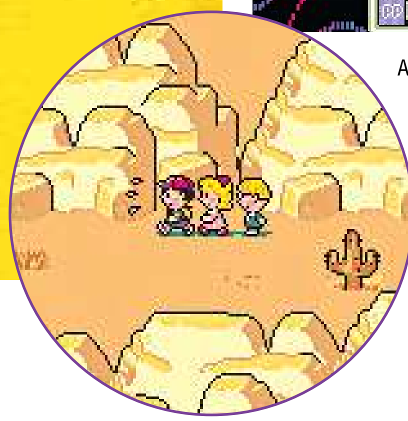
UK Release

Game: EarthBound
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Ape/HAL Laboratory
Genre: RPG
Release: N/A
Players: 1
ROM size: 2 Mbit





Above: Battles may be sparsely animated, but the woozily hypnotic backgrounds help convey the sense of an alien presence.



Left: Spend a while in Dusty Dunes Desert, and you might catch sunstroke, gradually lowering your HP the longer you stay outside.



Above: Dungeon Man – a man that is also a dungeon – will briefly join your party once you've completed his dungeon. Which is also him, naturally. Look, it's a weird game, OK?

GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?



If you never owned a Wii U, this might be the first opportunity you've had to play Shigesato Itoi's barmy RPG in Europe. A flop in the US, *EarthBound* never officially crossed over to these shores, and while its rarity contributed to its near-mythic status, the game's enduring brilliance is the main reason it's so fondly remembered.

At first you might wonder what all the fuss is about, since so many subsequent RPGs have nicked its best ideas. On the face of things its story, too, is fairly conventional rite-of-passage/save-the-world fare. But you'll quickly sense something a little off-key about *EarthBound*, from its outsider view of present-day (or rather, two decades old) Americana, which feels like an affectionate tribute as much as a satire, to its oddball magical-realist tone.

It's set in a world that somehow feels identifiable and otherworldly all at once, skilfully contrasting the alien with the mundane. Protagonist Ness can catch a cold and get homesick if he doesn't call home often enough. He can order a pizza, which will be delivered wherever he is in the world within three minutes. He'll munch burgers to gain health and he attacks enemies with baseball bats, yo-yos and slingshots. But the creatures he faces are anything but normal, ranging from Titanic Ants to Urban Zombies and Struttin' Evil Mushrooms.

Its turn-based combat is of its time – in other words, fairly simplistic – but it rattles along at a fair clip. Though random misses still prove frustrating, at least you have a chance to avoid your party being wiped out as your HP meter doesn't instantly drain, meaning you can recover from what might otherwise have been a fatal blow by defeating your attacker or using a health top-up. And grinding is much simpler than usual, since catching up to a low-level enemy instantly gives you the XP you'd have gained from an easy win.

A superb localisation brings Itoi's writing to life, capturing a blend of melancholy, humour and gentle whimsy that proves irresistible. It's a game that reminds you that, however many aliens, mutants and weirdos you face, there's nothing quite so strange and frightening as growing up.

● Chris Schilling

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
80%	87%	89%
GAMELIFE 88%	OVERALL SCORE:	89%

VERDICT: Much more than the sum of its modest parts, *EarthBound* has that sprinkling of magic the best Nintendo games possess.

ORIGINAL SCORE SP35 88%

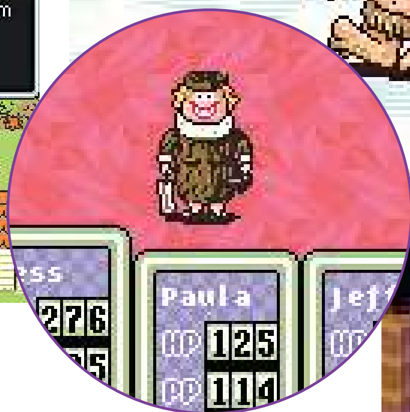




Left: Your journey will eventually take you to a fight between the rocks of Stonehenge, in the best and most surprising use of the Wiltshire monument since Spiñal Tap.

Below: Hospitals can revive unconscious characters – assuming you can afford the doctor's fees.

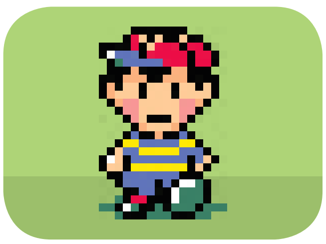




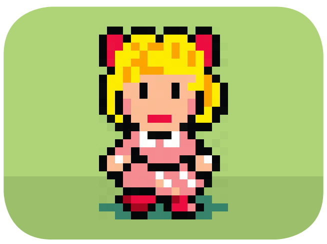
Above: It's worth talking to everyone and everything, just for the incidental dialogue.



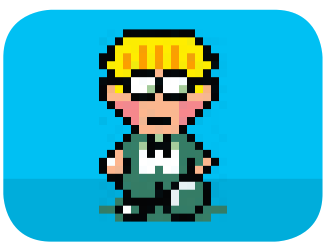
THE FAMILY NESS



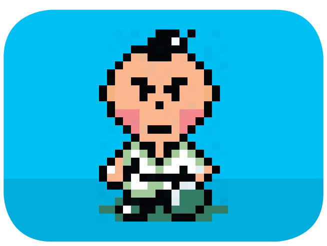
Silent protagonist Ness, a 13-year-old psychic baseball fan who's asked to save the world after a meteorite strike. Susceptible to colds and homesickness, he's a relatable hero.



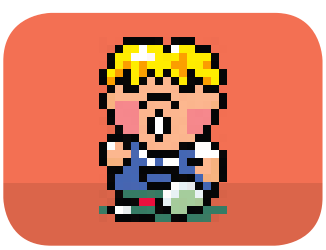
Rescued by Ness from a cult, Paula is less timid in the English version than in the Japanese release. She wields a mean frying pan, while her Psi skills put Ness to shame.



A smartly dressed nerd, Jeff joins Ness's band after he rescues them from zombies. With no Psi powers, his ability to spy on enemies and pinpoint weaknesses is valuable.



No sniggering! Prince Poo is *EarthBound* royalty. He joins as the fourth playable character once he's finished his training, bringing his own bespoke gear with him.



A spineless neighbour who cajoles Ness into helping find his brother, Pokey is briefly playable, though his combat moves range from playing dead to using Ness as a shield.

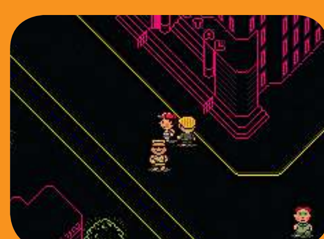


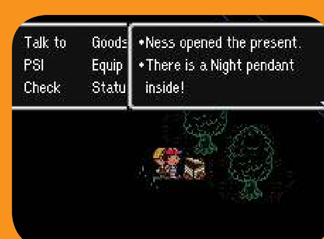
Jeff's dad, a brilliant scientist who helps Ness and friends with inventions including the Phase Distorters that let the party travel through space and time.

MODE 7 TIPS









The Night Pendant is an incredibly handy item, since it absorbs Flash attacks which can cause the target to burst into uncontrollable tears, preventing them from acting in battle. It is, however, one of the more difficult items to find. It's inside a box in Moonside – once you're there, you need to head towards the hospital and approach the man wandering around outside. Talk to him and he'll warp you next to a present box which contains the pendant. It's best given to Ness, since he's your main damage dealer.





To reach Moonside, you need to 'check' the bottles on the back wall next to the bar in the café. It's an illusion rather than a real place, with incoherent citizens.





FINAL FANTASY III

Which Final Fantasy is the best? To discuss that, we'll be in that bunker, wearing heavy armour.



UK Release

Game: Final Fantasy III (released as FFVI in Japan)
Publisher: Square
Developer: In-house
Genre: RPG
Release: N/A
Players: 1
ROM size: 24 Mbit

Locke the thief steals from monsters. Feral Gau learns from them. Setzer the Gambler rolls dice for random effects. Edgar favours power tools. It's not a tough game, but combat offers far more choice than hitting Attack every round.



MOOGLES ALL THE WAY DOWN



Each *Final Fantasy* stands largely alone, connected by themes, elements and mascots rather than a shared universe. While some aspects (such as the Active Time Battle system) have been honed over time, every title attempts to mark itself apart through innovation.



Chocobos A flightless avian steed, caught and tamed from the wild. It is the beast of burden in a world where horses are either myths – jivens, a nonicorn! – or capricious demonic foes (as on Earth). Hire a Chocobo from town stables for fast travel.



Elemental combat Take the idea of a fire bonus versus ice creatures, throw in buffs and status effects, then keep layering on the esoteric tricks – attacking zombies with cures, ricocheting spells off shields, or using an enemy's attack magic to restore you.



Moogles Another mascot of the series, a Moogle is available to recruit in the unusually conversant form of Mog. Though untranslatable, the meaning of its cute "Kupo!" call seems unlikely to contain foul oaths or negative criticism. "Kupopo!" is another matter.



Cid When only a *deus ex technica* can save the day, you need the recurring figure of an eccentric engineer and inventor. Hi, Cid! Though perhaps an ethics committee should investigate this Cid for the dubious live-subject experiments that fried Kefka's brain.



Avatars The greatest powers are drawn from a pantheist grab-bag of collectable titans and demiurges in which garuda and ifrit jostle with dragons and Norse gods. Equip Espers to micro-manage levelling gains, or invoke your avatar in battle.



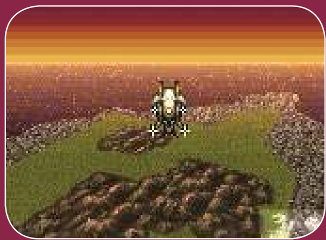
Cactuar First introduced here, this needling little succulent is infuriatingly evasive but usually surrenders something worthwhile when caught. At this point we should probably admit to owning an official Cactuar plushie. Yes, at our age. Yes, you can still buy them.



Magical tech *FF*'s fusion of magic and technology tackles Cartesian dualism by hypothesising consciousness as an inherent quality of matter subject to scientific laws. Or we could be reading too much into a fantasy excuse for power armour and soul crystals.

MODE 7 TIPS

The useful Gogo – a mime, not a dancer – can only be recruited by deliberately losing a fight and getting yourself gobbled up...



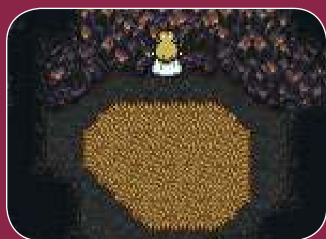
To recruit Gogo in the World of Ruin, first fly your nifty airship to Triangle Island (you can work that one out for yourself – all the clues are there).



Explore the island in search of a Zone Eater. Yes, it hungers for your zones! Don't fight, just defend until everyone has been swallowed whole.



You'll be intestinally conveyed to Gogo's subterranean colon-y. Escape by using the masked mimic's ability to copy what you do to the switches.



One more tip: on getting Mog, inspect the spot where he stood to find the Moogle Charm. This prevents random monster battles. Just drink that in.







Top right: The play-within-a-play opera sequence reveals a clever game that doesn't take itself too seriously.

Right: Villain Kefka: so very cuckoo you could get home to find him in your kid's high chair, demanding a spoon train of puréed banana.

GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?



By 1994 the SNES had become familiar architecture to Square, which duly pushed the machine to new audio-visual heights for its flagship RPG series and rival to *Dragon Quest*. Digitisation enabled sumptuous backdrops, while careful compression ambitiously captured an entire soundtrack. Nobuo Uematsu's extraordinary cinematic score remains a meisterwerk of the orchestral chiptune, and by granting every location a mood and every character a leitmotif, the music becomes another narrator in this consummate assembly.

It's a sure sign of a title intrinsically matched to its platform that subsequent remakes have fallen short. We've long held reservations about the original's sassy US translation, so a more faithful GBA localisation seemed welcome; sadly, the handheld port messed up the music. The PlayStation release pleasingly added a dash button but suffered disc loading times and ill-advised cutscene FMV. And proving that less is more, the SNES sprite designs are still astonishingly expressive while capturing the fey, feathery flourishes of Yoshitaka Amano's ethereal concept art.

While not well scripted, the story is hugely enjoyable and contains a couple of touchingly poignant scenes that might take you unawares. In the freeform third act you will keenly chase up the backstories of your ensemble cast, before tackling a flamboyant antagonist so villainous that he actually possesses a "muwahaha" sample.

It remains jarring that you're constantly plunged into random combat while trying to explore. Where *EarthBound* (p20) and subsequent titles devised more elegant encounters, this is a crude 8-bit hangover, and there comes a moment of eagerness to progress when a last-straw ambush of swirly Mode 7 to a bellicose riff will have you dropping the controller and declaring, "Enough!" But at least there's no shortage of FAQs to tell you where next if you forget.

So, is it better than *FFVII*? In several ways, yes. Might we now have preferred *Chrono Trigger* in its place? Oof, possibly. Besides, do you see a *Dragon Quest* game on the SNES Mini? Yes, we are actually running away now. Fire in the hole!

● Zy Nicholson

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
94%	95%	89%
GAMELIFE 90%	OVERALL SCORE:	92%

VERDICT: ***FFIII*** **(or** ***VI*****) is still widely regarded as the best in the series; and to this day, the SNES still boasts the finest version available. Tie weights around your gaming weekend and sink into its depths.**

ORIGINAL SCORE SP26 95%



UK Release

Game: F-Zero
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house
Genre: Racing
Release: April 1992
Players: 1
ROM size: 4Mbit

F-Zero's jumps are long, floaty, and only 63% guaranteed to end in broken bones.

F-ZERO

The Fast And The Furiously Ping-Ponging Off The Tracksides Before Bursting Into Flames.





Without scenery to speak of, track identity is all about colour combo. Blue plus purple equals White Land I.

GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?



Nintendo's 26th-century *F-Zero* has all the carnage of modern racing and more. Although not much more, because – bless it – it's a lean experience. Just 15 short tracks, four hovering vehicles (the default piloted by part-time bounty hunter Captain Falcon), and that's it. It wasn't much more than a snazzy SNES tech demo even back at the system's launch.

Still, the *pace* of it. Hit a speed boost in the top-of-the-line Fire Stingray, and *F-Zero* can still knot your stomach with how fast the twists and turns tear towards you. Which isn't bad for tracks that are simply a 2D carpet of pixels, skewed and spun around you by the SNES's clever Mode 7 graphics scaling and rotating ability.

It's married to a responsiveness that's pure Nintendo, the shoulder button allowing you to jink dinkily around the Tetronimo-shape bends. And, aptly, *F-Zero* is good at showing you the future: the perspective and pancake-flat track mean you have a clear view far ahead, aiding subtle snaking runs around mines and past rivals, collisions with both of which will deplete your energy bar. The control finesse was a revelation in 1990, and it's still hypnotic now.

It's testament to the feel of *F-Zero* that track names such as Mute City and Big Blue still have a sci-fi planetary magic about them, even when there's barely a pixel of real scenery to speak of. The AI's brand of magic isn't quite as welcome, with rival racers blazing past suddenly when by rights they should be a lap behind. At least they remind you that anything less than white-knuckled perfection will not be tolerated in *F-Zero*'s brutal future.

But even with practice, ricocheting wildly off walls like microwave popcorn is a constant in *F-Zero*, and your tolerance for it will dictate whether you get as far as the secret fourth 'Master' difficulty. Might be better to take up something easier instead – like bounty hunting.

● Mark Green

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
74%	71%	76%
GAMELIFE 62%	OVERALL SCORE:	75%

VERDICT: The great granddaddy of supersonic space-age racers still has a thing or two to teach young upstarts. A slick test of your eye-to-finger synapses.

ORIGINAL SCORE SP1 86%



MODE 7 TIPS

- Your power shield protects your fragile craft – guard it carefully and you can deliberately sacrifice it to cut a corner by smashing through a wall, or catapult off an impossible turn to get ahead of a rival.
- Completing any league in Expert class will unlock the Master class.
- Get a speed boost from the start by hitting the accelerator between the third countdown beep and the GO!!! signal.





Intentionally bouncing off a corner is better than *accidentally* bouncing off it five times in a row. Usually.

KIRBY'S DREAM COURSE

Despite a few rough patches, you'll mostly have a ball with this strange sporting hybrid.

UK Release

Game: Kirby's Dream Course
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: HAL Laboratory/ Nintendo EAD
Genre: Fantasy sports
Release: August 1995
Players: 1–2
ROM size: 1Mbit







Left: Long falls can cause you to bounce too far from the hole. Equip a parasol to control your descent.



Inset: The Freeze ability is a double-edged sword – the momentum can slide you past the hole.



Too many shots can lose you a life. Stay under par for more wiggle room on the next hole.

MODE 7 TIPS

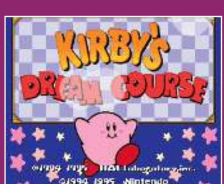
- **Applying the right spin is vital on lofted shots. A bit of back lets you hit airborne enemies and return to safe ground; apply plenty of top to skim across water.**
- **Getting a hole in one may seem impossible but it nets you an extra life, so it's worth trying for.**





Don't forget you can add side spin to groundstrokes, too, when a straight shot to the hole is blocked.

GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?



Kirby's natural roundness makes Masahiro Sakurai's malleable mascot the perfect fit for sports games. But *Dream Course* can't quite decide which sport it is. It's ostensibly a golf game, yet it was titled *Kirby Bowl* in Japan – perhaps for the way you roll over opponents en route to the hole. Then again, in the way you're invited to smash poor Kirby off walls and pull off clever trickshots, it can often feel like you're playing billiards. It might sound a bit of a mess, but this unusual fusion is surprisingly cohesive.

If you've come to expect a lightweight challenge from *Kirby* games, be warned: behind that cute exterior lies a heart of flint. Holes are littered with bumps, ramps, water and sand traps – there's no taking a drop here; you're forced to play from wherever Kirby lies. Land in the drink, and it might take you several shots just to get out. With spiked hazards and barrier-free sections that can send you plummeting off the edge, it's crazy golf in every sense.

Still, the enemies prove helpful. Some you merely need to flatten, but others transfer abilities, per Kirby tradition – and they can be triggered while he's still in motion. Pick up a parasol and you can float down to the hole; the Stone ability lets you stop a wayward shot on a dime; plough through a snowman and you'll be able to freeze water, sliding safely across to the other side. The order in which you defeat them is key, too: the last enemy alive becomes the hole, so you'll often find multiple ways to tackle individual courses.

It's maybe a little too exacting: the difference between a birdie and a triple-bogey can be a single notch on the spin-o-meter, and losing a life can leave you shy of the ability you need for an under-par score on the following hole. No classic, then, but an absorbing little curio that's worth revisiting – even if there are plenty of better games with which to busy yourself first.

● Chris Schilling

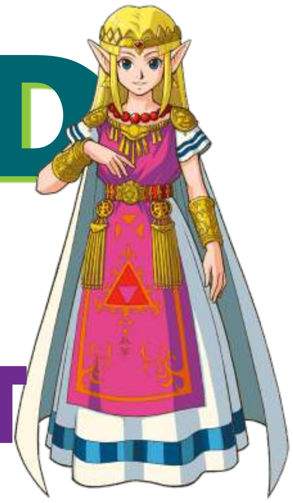
GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
76%	72%	75%
GAMELIFE 80%	OVERALL SCORE:	74%

VERDICT: Finicky challenges take the shine off an inventive oddity, meaning Kirby's twist on golf doesn't quite play like a dream.

ORIGINAL SCORE	SP28 86%

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

A LINK TO THE PAST



Link's triumphant third outing deserves its classic status, and still has a surprise or two in store.

Link lifts the Master Sword for the first time, and an icon is born. Shame the pink hair didn't stay, mind.

UK Release

Game: The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Genre: Action RPG
Release: November 1991
Players: 1
ROM size: 1 Mbit

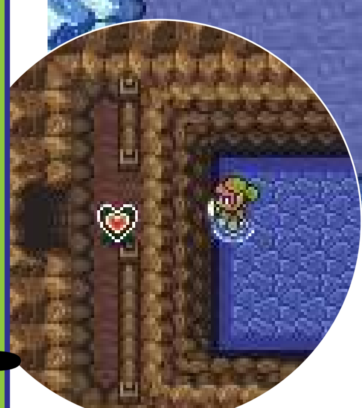


Below: This wonderfully eerie mist effect adds to the ethereal ambience of the Lost Woods.









Above: A classic *Zelda* moment: Nintendo's designers know exactly how to tease your curiosity.

Left: It's worth seeking out extra hearts for the enemy-stuffed later dungeons.

MODE 7 TIPS





It's easy to underestimate just how useful the Pegasus shoes and hookshot can be, particularly in combat situations. Dashing into enemies is often a valid tactic – as well as a handy escape strategy when things are getting hairy. The hookshot, meanwhile, can easily stun opponents, or grapple objects if you need to close a gap – or, by contrast, put some distance between you and a boss when you're low on health. And while it's extended, projectiles won't harm you.

Even armoured enemies aren't immune to the hookshot, though you should probably avoid sprinting at anything carrying a sword.

UNLOCK TURTLE ROCK



First, get the Quake Medallion. Throw an item between the ring of stones at the Lake Of Ill Omen and the catfish gives you the medallion. Back in Hyrule, pull out your flute.



Get the kindly duck to fly you over to Death Mountain. Once there, climb up the long ladder towards the west side and work your way back around to the entrance of the Tower of Hera.



Keep heading east – using your hammer to whack down the posts – until you reach this point. Lift the large rock and move onto the ledge with the three stakes.



Hammer all three into the floor, starting from the right and moving anticlockwise. Once the left one is down, a portal will appear. Go inside to be whisked to the Dark World.



Now you're right where you need to be. Stand on the edge of the roof with the sigil beneath your feet and use the medallion. The turtle's mouth will open, revealing a set of steps…



Inside, use the Cane of Somaria to trigger the moving platforms, and don't forget the Magic Cape can be used to avoid hazards. Use the fire and ice rods for the dungeon boss.









Left: Link's fight with Ganon can't quite match what's gone before, but the closing scenes more than compensate.



GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?



Ocarina Of Time might be the *Zelda* that's topped the most best-ever lists, but in many ways its 16-bit predecessor is the more important game. It's easy to forget just how radical it was, but many of the ideas it introduced – from heart pieces to the hookshot, the Master Sword to spin attacks, to the notion of two interconnected worlds – were so good they quickly became part of the series fabric. It's hardly an exaggeration to say this is where Link's story really began; where the legend that would be retold and revisited in the decades to follow first started to properly take shape.

It's a vital historical document, then, but more importantly it's still a brilliant game. We've explored technically much larger versions of Hyrule in terms of real estate, but it still feels huge. Dense and intricate, it doesn't waste a single tile of screen. Dungeons are layered and labyrinthine, looping up and around so you don't realise you're being nudged down a linear path, or giving you room to explore without the sticking points that come with being truly lost. It pulls off the remarkable feat of making you aware of 3D space within a two-dimensional world: after following a circuitous route, it suddenly dawns that you're now looking down on a room you visited several minutes ago. Or you might drop through the floor onto a lower level to get to an otherwise unreachable treasure chest.

Yes, some of its ideas have been dulled slightly by familiarity, its best bits working so well that Nintendo was naturally keen to reuse them several times over. But it's still capable of surprising you. You'll likely have forgotten its mischievous streak. Take the moment you're asked to pull a lever "over there" and you realise there's two to choose from; pick the wrong one and a cascade of snakes drops down from above. Or when you're encouraged to speak to the locals, and the first villager immediately alerts the castle's soldiers. And how about the fake Master Swords, gear-snatching thieves and maze-dwelling monkeys? In other words, it's everything you remember it being, and so much more: play it again for a stirring reminder of a truly timeless adventure.

● Chris Schilling

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
85%	90%	92%

GAMELIFE	OVERALL SCORE:
91%	92%

VERDICT: A legend by name and reputation, *A Link To The Past* boasts two unforgettable worlds with clever puzzles and memorable encounters at every turn. Magnificent.

ORIGINAL SCORE SP2 93%

KIRBY SUPER STAR



No need to Kirb your enthusiasm for this charming compendium, which packs in the fun.

The Beam ability has decent range and can hit several enemies within a single arc.



UK Release

Game: Kirby Super Star
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: HAL Laboratory
Genre: Compilation
Release: March 1996
Players: 1–2 simultaneously
ROM size: 4 Mbit



Right: You have just five Maximum Tomatoes to get through the arena, so save them until you're desperate for a top-up.

Inset: Some helpers are more adept than others, but occasionally you're left with no choice but to wade in with a brolly.

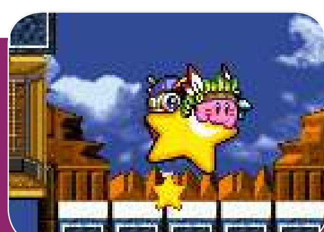




MODE 7 TIPS

■ It may not be in the spirit of fair play, but you can bring an AI helper into arena battles. Just choose one ability, conjure an ally, then pick another before diving in.
■ If you fancy being invincible for a level, input Right, Right, Right, Left, Left, Left, A, B, A, B, A, B at the beginning of the stage.
■ Very rarely, the Stone power will transform you into a statue of Samus or Mario. Which is always nice, no?

Having an AI helper also gives you another ability to choose from if your current one isn't helping against the boss in question.





Above: Megaton Punch invites you and a CPU or human rival to thump a stone with such force it cracks the surface of a planet.



GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?



You can trace the generosity of the *Smash Bros* games back here, Kirby's eighth game in four years. Masahiro Sakurai has never been one to stint on ideas, and while you could complain about the size of the servings here – unlike Kirby, some of the games are a little on the slender side – you're not left wanting for variety. Sakurai has served up a veritable buffet of Kirby: a couple of appetisers, a clutch of slightly meatier main courses, and the occasional amuse-bouche for good measure.

Most are built around its hero's Copy ability, where you ingest enemies to absorb their powers to use as weapons. These range from beam lasers to swords, hammers to bombs – and more outlandish abilities such as Mike, which essentially lets you sing enemies to death. You can also spend an existing ability to call in an AI helper, giving you access to two potentially very different skills at once, which helps when it comes to the many boss fights.

The most substantial of these games is The Great Cave Offensive, which sees Kirby collect as many treasures as he can (some of which, as with *Smash Bros*, nod towards other Nintendo games). With large levels, multiple routes and sparse save points, it's also the most challenging game of the whole package. Milky Way Wishes is similarly hefty, with one key difference: Kirby doesn't consume enemies, but collects permanent abilities.

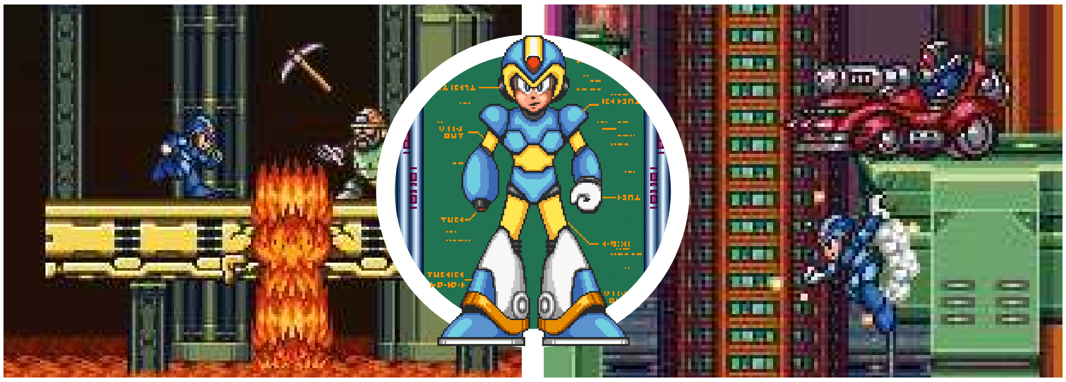
Other modes offer slight variations on your typical Kirby platformer, but then there's the exhilarating Gourmet Race – where Kirby and Dedede sprint to collect the most food, set to one of the most memorable themes of the 16-bit era – as well as an arena battle mode and a pair of two-player mini-games. *Super Star* is unlikely to convert those immune to its hero's charms, and a 2008 DS remake threw in a clutch of extras that make it the definitive version, but this compilation captures the essence of Kirby.

● Chris Schilling

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
80%	86%	82%
GAMELIFE 80%	OVERALL SCORE:	82%

VERDICT: An enjoyably diverse showcase for an ever-versatile mascot, *Super Star* gives Kirby the perfect stage to strut his stuff.

ORIGINAL SCORE | SP44 89%



UK Release

Game: Mega Man X
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house
Genre: Platform shooter
Release: May 1994
Players: 1
ROM size: 12Mbit

Left: X faces some blasts from *Mega Man*'s past, such as pickaxe-chucking Picket Men.

MEGA MAN X

Mega Man's formula, expanded and perfected onto a new generation of hardware – for both console and hero.



X's prologue stage opens the door for a more involved narrative than in previous *Mega Man* games while giving a glimpse of the larger world (civilian vehicles fleeing in panic).

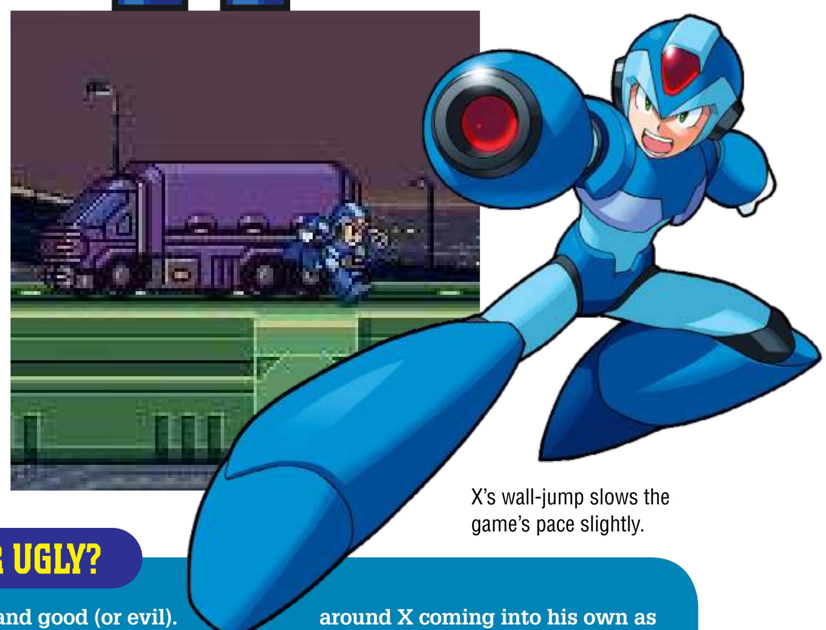
MODE 7 TIPS

You can attempt the levels in any order, and the game uses a password system to save progress, but some combinations of numbers have different effects. The most powerful is 8441 2176 4423, which unlocks all upgrades and hearts, and defeats all bosses. But where's the fun in that? For more of a challenge try 6485 1146 2321, which unlocks the upgrades but leaves the bosses alive.





A welcome change of pace at the time, newly introduced characters such as Zero and Sigma would eventually become overused. Nice while it lasted, though.



X's wall-jump slows the game's pace slightly.

GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?



Mega Man fans got an early taste of the fatigue that comes from annualised franchise sequels way back in the 8-bit days, long before *Assassin's Creed* and *Call of Duty* made a business model of yearly iteration. Thankfully, the series' SNES debut gave things a much-needed overhaul, delivering on the promise of "super" sequels inherent in the console's name. *Mega Man X* didn't simply spruce up the platform adventures of Capcom's robot hero with fancier graphics and sound; it rebuilt the franchise. In comparison to the woefully predictable *Mega Man 6* (which showed up on the NES at around the same time), *Mega Man X* felt almost like an entirely new concept.

The overhaul began with Mega Man himself. Like the console that powered him, Mega Man X (X for short) was a whole new machine. As roboticist Dr Light's ultimate invention, X possessed boundless capacity for power, self-awareness, and good (or evil). In gameplay terms, he could still swipe his defeated foes' powers for his own use, but he could also upgrade himself with better armour, dash boots, even Ryu's Shoryuken. He also came equipped with a wall-jump right out of the shrink-wrap.

After a brief prologue, X can pick his path through the game from a menu of eight different stages, and Capcom crammed those worlds with secrets and surprises. Gone were the themed robots with names ending in '-man', replaced by 'maverick' robots in a variety of shapes and sizes. Every weapon power-up interacts with enemies and environments in unexpected ways. Even the order in which you complete the stages can affect later ones.

Poor X had a tendency to feel like a secondary character in his later games thanks to the enormous popularity of his pal Zero, who debuts (and – spoilers! – dies) in this game. Happily, though, the series' plot hadn't ballooned into a baroque mess with this first entry, and everything here revolves around X coming into his own as a hero for the first time. It's a dozen stages of intense, fat-free, run-and-gun action that embody the best ideas the *Mega Man* franchise has to offer.

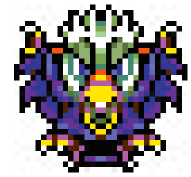
● Jeremy Parish

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
84%	80%	89%
GAMELIFE	OVERALL SCORE:	89%
82%		

VERDICT: A high-water mark for 2D platform shooting, taking full advantage of the choose-your-own-route *Mega Man* style.

ORIGINAL SCORE SP17 88%

SECRET OF MANA





It's dangerous to go alone! Take a friend (or two) along through Squaresoft's sprawling multi-player action RPG.

UK Release

Game: Secret of Mana
Publisher: Squaresoft
Developer: In-house
Genre: Action RPG
Release: November 1994
Players: 1–3 simultaneously
ROM size: 16 Mbit

Enemies love to use skills that take one character temporarily out of the action, forcing their comrades to lend a hand (or at least take up the slack).



Below: Good news for this undead hipster demigod: '90s-style neon-green topknots are very in again.







Above: Enemies immune to one character's attack emphasise the need for teamwork among players.



Left: *Mana*'s characters and monsters alike possess ample personality, although sometimes that personality amounts to "utterly revolting".

MODE 7 TIPS









Though *Mana* makes an admirable effort to shake up RPG dogma by throwing out turn-based combat and incorporating cooperative play, it is ultimately a vintage role-playing game – and that means lots of grinding for stats. More than usual: *Mana* gives your party eight distinct, permanent weapons and eight categories of both offensive and defensive spells. Each of these need to be levelled up – per character, in the case of weapons. You'll want to find enemy-packed places near inns to buff your skills – that way, you can get into a cycle of seeking out combat to use up your magic points, then a sleep to recharge, then repeat…



The real secret of Mana is… lots of grinding for every single weapon or spell. Worth it when you're hugely powerful, but time-consuming.

WORLD OF MANA



Mana's central theme is the conflict between technology and nature, with the Mana Tree representing the power of life and the artificial Mana Fortress powering the bad guys.



Before you gain the ability to fly around at will on dragon-back, *Mana* forces you to rely on a rather less encouraging mode of travel: being fired from a cannon.



As a sequel to *Final Fantasy Adventure*, Mana wastes no time in establishing familiar faces, such as rabites. Adorable! But they have the word 'bite' right there in their name.



Mana's world becomes increasingly strange the farther you travel into it – from forests where the seasons change every few feet, to this bizarre desert dotted with fallen stars.



Right around the time Rudolph the reindeer conscripts you to rescue Santa Claus, you begin to wonder if maybe Mana's world might be our own ruined future.



The underground passage leading to the imperial capital is zombie-filled. The music doesn't ape Thriller, but that doesn't keep the undead from performing some slick dance moves.







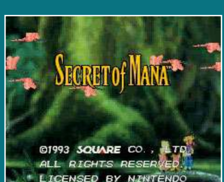


Top: What kind of SNES RPG would it be if it didn't show off some Mode 7 effects from time to time?

Left: *Mana*'s plot revolves around the world-shaping power of a magical tree.



GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?



If you've ever witnessed an argument about whether or not *The Legend Of Zelda* is an action RPG, you've witnessed true semantic hell in person. Now, *Secret Of Mana – there's* an indisputable action RPG. A sequel to *Final Fantasy Adventure*, the weird yet wonderful Game Boy *Zelda/Final Fantasy* hybrid, *Mana* feels far more like its own creature. You can't swing a dead rabite here without hitting an RPG system or two: the heroes level up weapons and spells while battling an ancient superweapon. You don't get more RPG than that.

Yet even as it leans into its role-playing heritage, *Mana* thoughtfully integrates action-game aspirations as well. You cast spells by bringing up a menu, yes, but a truly successful mage needs to master the timing that allows spell commands to be stacked in real time. Your party can wield any of the eight weapons you acquire, most of which have useful effects such as cutting down thick weeds, but attacks require you to pause after each strike to restore your stamina, effectively turning *Mana*'s real-time combat into turn-based action.

***Mana* exceeds the mundane boundaries of the classic RPG by embracing its cooperative multi-player element. Once you've assembled the hero's three-member party, the remainder of the quest can be played by three people. *Mana* features several brilliant design choices that help compensate for what could have become multi-player chaos. The 'ring menu' system means quick, intuitive command prompts that minimise disruption when using spells or items. Each player controls a separate character, each of whom has a clearly defined combat role: the Boy is the bruiser, the Girl the support mage, and the Sprite is best at dishing out elemental damage.**

Sure, *Mana*'s level-up mechanics lend themselves to toilsome grinding, and its chaotic development process (Square originally intended it to be a SNES CD-ROM game) resulted in a glitchy, sometimes broken game. But when you journey alongside two friends through *Mana*'s lush, green world, accompanied by one of the finest game soundtracks ever created, it's hard to nitpick the little things.

● Jeremy Parish

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
81%	95%	80%
GAMELIFE 92%	OVERALL SCORE:	87%

VERDICT: A sometimes messy yet engrossing adventure, *Secret Of Mana* is enjoyable on your own, but the teamwork and cooperation in multi-player transform it into a unique, memorable experience.

ORIGINAL SCORE | **SP15 94%**

STAR FOX



The only thing Fox McCloud and co can't rescue is the framerate in this Super FX powerhouse.

Some of the visuals, such as the combinations of background images and looming 3D structures, are still impressive and contrast with bare outer-space levels.



UK Release

Game: Star Fox
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Argonaut/Nintendo
Genre: 3D shoot-'em-up
Release: February 1993
Players: 1
ROM size: 8 Mbit

Above: Right from the off, *Star Fox* is all cinematic sci-fi attitude. No wonder the series is a 24-year fan favourite.

Left: A wireframe Arwing means you've grabbed a shield. Useful against angry sea monsters.



Clever colour-palette switches create convincing new worlds.

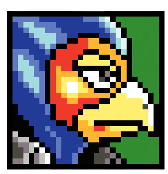
MODE 7 TIPS

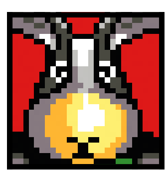
- When you see groups of five asteroids on Level 1-2, shoot the red asteroids and fly through the gaps. Then blast the smiling face. Secret Black Hole level! You're welcome.
- Another secret area is accessible from Level 3, again from the asteroids. Destroy the second big space rock, then ram into the bird-like thing that appears. Beware, though: once you're in the alternate dimension, there is no escape.





It's amazing how many enemies have slipped into the tortuous vortex of the Black Hole. Clumsy beggars.







GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?



A reverby voice drawls "Good luck!" at the start of every mission – but today, it feels almost like a warning. *Star Fox* is still *good*, in its own distinct ways. But it's a challenge to enjoy it as starry eyed players did back in 1993.

It still glows with the imagination and love that blossomed from Nintendo and Argonaut's partnership. Fox McCloud and his anime crew are irresistible, and the 13 planets and zones are a kaleidoscope of chunky polygonal creativity.

The Super FX chip in *Star Fox*'s cartridge might have lent the SNES extra power, but it was overworked. Even if your eyes can cope with the wobbly polygons and creaking framerate, your fingers probably can't. Aiming your lasers isn't easy when the action is being delivered almost as a series of postcards.

Reacting in time to dodge asteroids and enemies is often impossible – and through the syrup of sluggish shapes you'll often accidentally blast fellow pilots Slippy, Peppy and Falco. Or rescue them without trying, which somehow feels worse (despite the adorable "Mind your own business, Fox!" from perpetual grump Falco).

Following all three map paths to tyrannical astro ape Andross is still rewarding, and *Star Fox* tries its best to avoid repetitiveness – bosses get bigger, bolder and more baffling, culminating in Fortuna's bonkers two-headed dragon popping out Yoshi eggs. Meanwhile, Koji Kondo's timeless soundtrack gives every level a cinematic flair, even if the tunes stray rather close to the composer's own *Zelda* melodies.

With its younger, never-officially-released offspring *Star Fox 2* finally emerging from the shadows, the original *Star Fox* is looking a little sheepish now. Yes, there's probably a fox/sheep joke in there somewhere, but I'm too lazy to think of it. (*You're fired, and so on – Ed.*)

● Mark Green

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
64%	88%	70%
GAMELIFE 77%	OVERALL SCORE:	73%

VERDICT: A bit jerky and unresponsive for today's tastes, but still a boisterous barrel roll across the galaxy, with atmosphere and adventure in spades.

ORIGINAL SCORE SP7 93%





UK Release

Game: Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house
Genre: Fighting
Release: October 1993
Players: 1–2 simultaneously
ROM size: 2.5Mbit

Above: Dhalsim really wants you to stay away.

Above right: Arcade mode's bonus stages are present and correct.



STREET FIGHTER II TURBO

Is Capcom's smash hit still the greatest fighting game on the planet? It won't take Fei Long to find out.



Mirror matches weren't possible in previous iterations. Ken only exists because Capcom wanted to let both players 'be' Ryu.



MODE 7 TIPS

The Grand Master bosses are intimidating, but can be cheesed. Balrog is hopeless against sweeps, while Vega's walldives lose to jump-back kicks. You'll beat Sagat by inching forward and attacking low. And while M Bison is terrifying, he's clueless if you're aggressive.

Boss names are different in Japan, so they're generically known as Boxer, Claw, Dictator and, er, Sagat.







GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?



Even for a series so heavily iterated as *Street Fighter II*, this takes some beating. Released into arcades just nine months after *SFII: Champion Edition*, *Turbo*'s only real point of difference is an optional faster playing speed.

There are no new playable characters – those would be introduced in the next instalment, *Super SFII* – and only a handful of adjustments to existing ones. Ryu and Ken can Hurricane Kick in the air; Chun-Li gets her fireball and an airborne Spinning Bird Kick, which is ludicrous even in the context of a series with such a profound lack of interest in the laws of physics. Speaking of which, Dhalsim gets his teleport here, too.

At the time, this was a worthwhile release on the SNES. The console never got a home conversion of *Champion Edition*, which made the four *SFII* bosses playable for the first time and enabled 'mirror' matches, in which both players could choose the same character. The adjustable speed, meanwhile, gave PAL players a means of offsetting the 50Hz conversion's miserable drop in tempo. Today, it is merely a curio from an era before Ken's fierce-punch Shoryuken set enemies on fire. Before fighting games thought about disguising how blatantly they were reading your inputs. Before Super combos, parries, comeback mechanics and frame-perfect combo timings turned what was once a truly mass-market phenomenon into a hardcore (though brilliant) niche.

It's pleasant enough – it is *Street Fighter*, after all – and at least the SNES Mini version is a US ROM, running at 60Hz. If all you're after is a trip down memory lane, then this will see you just fine. Yet if the real test of games of this era is seeing how well they hold up today, prepare to be disappointed. Unlike several of the other games that come installed on Nintendo's dinky delight, *SFIIT* has been surpassed again and again, most often at the hands of its own maker.

● Nathan Brown

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
82%	75%	80%
GAMELIFE 76%	OVERALL SCORE:	78%

VERDICT: What was once considered one of the best games on the SNES is showing its age these days. Still iconic, but no longer a classic.

ORIGINAL SCORE SP11 96%



SUPER MARIO WORLD

There may be a mind-boggling 96 exits, but you won't want to leave this world.





Several enemy types made their debut in *World*, including the irritatingly invulnerable Fuzzies.

UK Release

Game: Super Mario World
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Genre: Platform
Release: April 1992
Players: 1–2
ROM size: 0.5 Mbit



FASTEST FINISH



You can conquer the game with no more than 11 exits unlocked. First, you'll need to finish all of Yoshi's Island. Then, in Donut Plains 1, grab a cape and fly to the top right to find a keyhole.



This will take you to Donut Secret 1, where you need to carry a P-Switch to a row of blocks with a ?-Block at the end. Hit the Switch to reach the block, which holds a key to the nearby hole.



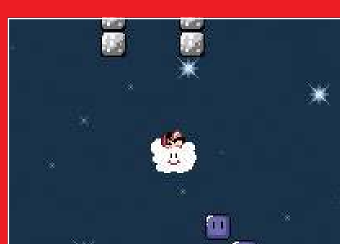
Here, at the Donut Secret House, you'll need to bring a P-Switch in the second area to a central door. Blocks appear, so stand on the central one and hit the block above to release a beanstalk.



Reach the door at the top before the P-Switch timer runs out and you'll fight a Big Boo by picking up blocks and hurling them up. Hit it three times, and you'll be able to access Star Road.



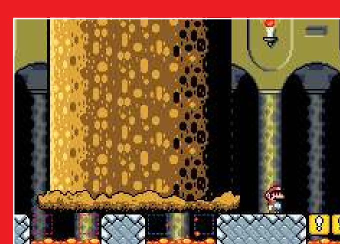
In Star World 1, spin-jump through the rightmost blocks to reach a keyhole. On the next stage, feed the baby blue Yoshi until it's full-size, then swim below the green pipe to another keyhole.



By comparison, Star World 3 is a little trickier, but if you can defeat Lakitu by throwing a block, you can rise through the gap at the top of the screen. Bear left to reach yet another keyhole.



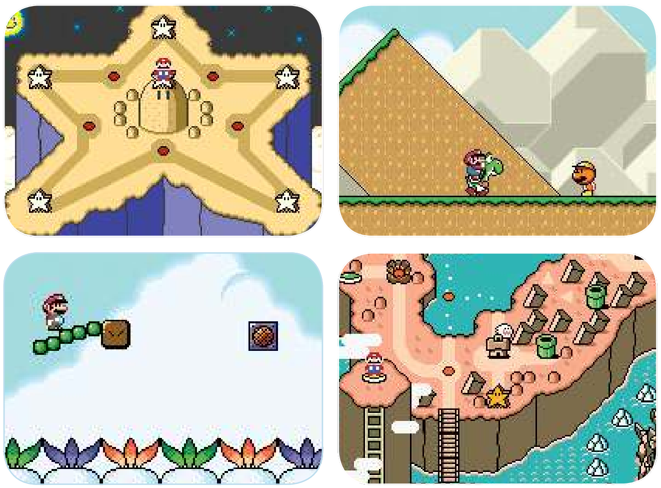
Take a blue Yoshi into Star World 4. Eat a shell and fly right, spitting it out before it gets swallowed. Beneath the stone blocks you'll find a keyhole. We needn't tell you where the key lies.



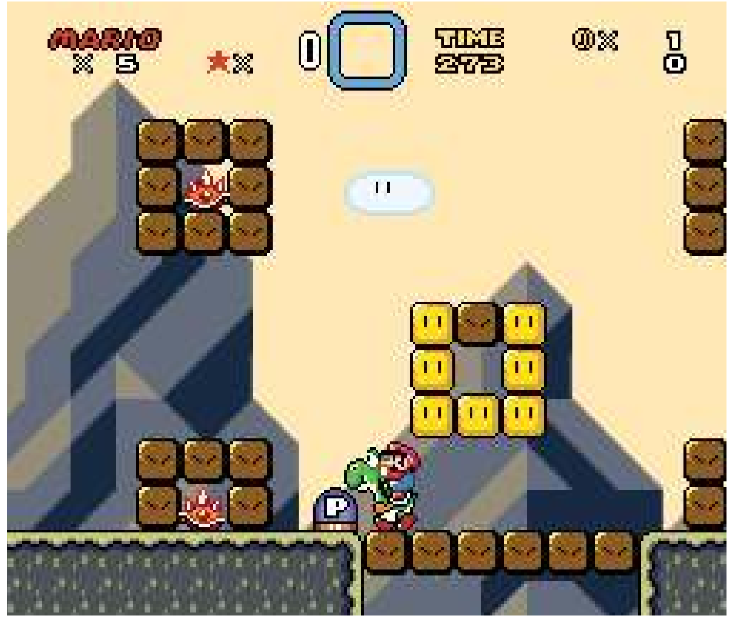
Now you can stroll down to the warp star, which will take you right to the door of Bowser's Castle. Defeat Mario's arch-nemesis and you've completed the game within just 11 exits.

MODE 7 TIPS

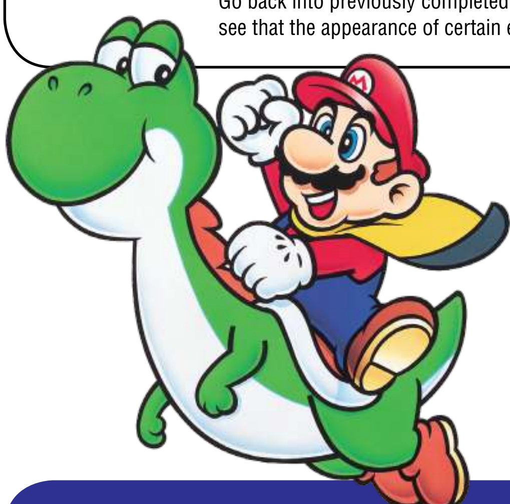
The summery hues of the world map can be replaced by more autumnal tones. To make the change, you'll need to finish the Special World stages, which you can access via the secret exit of Star World 5. You'll need to have visited the four Switch Palaces first. Bring either a cape or – preferably – a blue Yoshi (which can be easily obtained from Star World 2) with you, and at the top-right of the level you'll find a keyhole. This will unlock the path to a warp to the Special World.



Go back into previously completed levels, and you'll also see that the appearance of certain enemies has changed.







Top right: Yoshi's tongue can reach enemies through blocks to gobble them up. It's also useful for ferrying items around.

Right: Swarms of disappearing Boo Buddies make for a fraught swim through the Sunken Ghost Ship.

GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?



Mario's vacation in Dinosaur Land was a break from the Mushroom Kingdom in more ways than one. It's certainly a departure in terms of looks: anyone with a copy of *Super Mario Maker* can quickly trace a visual lineage from the original through *SMB3* to the *New Super Mario Bros* aesthetic, with the plumber's exhilarating SNES adventure feeling like the odd game out. It's typified by its hero's amusingly squat pre-Super Mushroom form: it's still recognisably Mario, but there's something a little different about him.

Many game connoisseurs have *SMB3* pegged as the plumber's finest side-scroller, but *World* pushes its influential predecessor's ideas that much further. Take its world map, which has arguably never been bettered, even by Nintendo. It's a wondrous, intricate network of paths, hidden exits, keyholes – worlds within worlds, even. It's absolutely stuffed with secrets, many of which demand a keen eye and creative play to reach, and as you find them and new routes and locations are revealed, it gives what is essentially a stage-select screen a tangible sense of place. The names help: rather than Worlds 1-1 and 3-2, you find yourself exploring Chocolate Island, Donut Plains and Vanilla Dome. By the end, you feel less like you've finished a series of loosely connected obstacle courses, and more like you've completed a journey.

Meanwhile, the stages themselves are some of Mario's finest. Tezuka, Miyamoto and company concoct some fiendish designs, from the perplexing puzzle boxes of the Ghost Houses to the tricksy challenges of the Special World. Levels stretch higher and farther, gaps grow wider and enemies and hazards more plentiful – but you do have some help to overcome even the toughest tests. There's Yoshi, of course, always so much more than a quicker way to get around, alongside perhaps Mario's greatest power-up, the Cape Feather. It might feel a bit like cheating, but then the art of flight takes some skill to master, from finding room to accelerate for take-off to pushing the D-pad rhythmically to stay airborne. Swooping below the gate on Cheese Bridge to reach yet another secret exit is just one unforgettable moment among many in a game that suggests Mario should take a holiday more often.

● Chris Schilling

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
86%	91%	93%
GAMELIFE 91%	OVERALL SCORE:	93%

VERDICT: *Super Mario World* carries platform games to thrilling heights where the process of unearthing new stages is every bit as enjoyable as completing them. Still unassailably brilliant.

ORIGINAL SCORE | SP2 94%

SUPER CASTLEVANIA IV

The ghoulish platformer that helped define the early days of the SNES.

GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?



Unleashed in Japan on Hallowe'en 1991, *Akumajō Dorakyura* (literally Devil's Castle Dracula) was essentially a major overhaul of the original NES game, and one of the last linear vampire hunts.

Reflecting its arcade-influenced times, this fourth edition is still pure hack 'n' slash. Notably, the new, multi-directional capability of our hero's whip/chain grafts a much more satisfying, powerful range of attacks (including a projectile block) onto the series' simplistic core, while its secondary purpose, as a grappling hook for crossing gaps, liberates levels from tight constraints. The introduction of crouching, plus mid-air direction changes, further loosens up the controls.

Visually and technically, *Castlevania IV* was still relatively early days for Konami's 16-bit muscle, but there are still memorable sections and set-pieces. Flat early levels are transcended by multi-parallax backdrops, and the unforgettable, if gimmicky, rotating Mode 7 levels still compel gritted jaws to slacken.

Where this sequel raises the wooden stakes is in its astonishing soundtrack – a cinematic symphony of organs, drums, swirling strings, jazzy piano, double bass and psychedelic synth arrangements. As a chiptune soundtrack it's arguably never been bettered, even 26 years on.

Castlevania IV boldly sets the stage for what 16-bit console action games should aspire to be. For overall challenge, depth and scope it has been eclipsed by a newer generation, but its punchy arcade action and surreal atmospherics are like nails in the coffin of the 8-bit era.

● Jason Brookes

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
85%	96%	88%
GAMELIFE 80%	OVERALL SCORE:	88%

VERDICT: A spine-tingling hack 'n' slash epic combining perhaps the most rewarding *Castlevania* combat system with ground-breaking music and visuals.

ORIGINAL SCORE | **SP1** 91%



Borrowing a great idea from *Super Mario World*, it's possible to use gates to flip your way into fenced-off areas in the background.





UK Release

Game: Super Castlevania IV
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-house
Genre: Action platform
Release: October 1991
Players: 1
ROM size: 8 Mbit



MODE 7 TIPS

■ Our hero's whip (which quickly upgrades to an iron chain) can be used in ingenious ways as players get full directional control of it for the first time in a *Castlevania* game. A useful strategy is killing off enemies by simply by letting the limp weapon hang in their path from above.

■ Beating the game once unlocks a 'hard' mode in which the castle contains more enemies, each with more health.





Right: Our musclebound hero, er, Simon, descends down an inner tower keep, asking you to think about making attacks from above.

Main: Stage 6 ratchets up the difficulty courtesy of some hounds of hell that refuse to die. Three levels of parallax scrolling shine beautifully here.





UK Release

Game: Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house
Genre: Platform action
Release: December 1992
Players: 1
ROM size: 8Mbit

Far left: This is Level 1. Get used to it because you'll be seeing it extremely often.

MODE 7 TIPS

■ In a rare act of leniency, after taking a hit Arthur is allowed to fight on briefly (geddit?) in his pants – your cue to find new armour. Bronze armour beefs up his weapons, while gold gives him a shield and magic powers. Anything's better than pants.
■ When picking up the key at the end of the level, try pressing Up.







Beating the game unlocks the even harder 'professional' difficulty. Good luck with that.



If there's one place where you don't want to be stripped down to just your boxer shorts, it's this frozen level. Brrrr.





SUPER GHOULS 'N GHOSTS

After 25 years, this ultra-tough platformer still has us tearing out our hair.

GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?



The reopening of the *Super Play* office has also reopened some old debates. *Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts*, for example: is it "annoyingly unforgiving" and "frustrating to play"? Or a finely polished platforming gem for players who relish a challenge?

It's still harrowingly difficult, that's for sure, not least because of its strangely primitive jump system. Once Arthur leaves the ground you can't steer him, so misjudge things and you're left sailing helplessly to your doom. It's more 1980s Spectrum than 1990s SNES, and takes some serious getting used to. That, combined with the need for pixel-perfect dodging of respawning baddies, and the femtoseconds you're generally given to react to collapsing platforms and other unexpected twists, means that to make progress you'll need to play each level over and over, mastering every inch of it and dying thousands of times (assuming you're not using the SNES Mini's Rewind jiggery-pokery, naturally).

On the plus side, the armour upgrade process works nicely, with Arthur's top-of-the-range gold outfit giving him magic powers and a shield. The jumping isn't quite as crude as I made out earlier: a second stab of the button mid-leap lets you jump farther or even change direction, an important technique to master. While the graphics seem nothing special at first, they really grow on you – level two is particularly lovely, with its haunted shipwreck rolling among the waves. And while it's tricky, it's generally fair: a genuine test of skill.

Maybe don't make *Super Ghouls 'n Ghosts* the first game you try when you power up your new SNES Mini. Hone your old-school platforming skills on *Mega Man X* or *Contra III*, and save this until you're at the very top of your game.

● Jonathan Davies

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
82%	80%	76%
GAMELIFE 80%	OVERALL SCORE:	78%

VERDICT: The SNES equivalent of a well-known yeasty spread, this will delight expert gamers but reduce most others to tears.

ORIGINAL SCORE | SP2 85%

YOSHI'S ISLAND



Living proof that classic game design isn't just for dinosaurs – though it certainly can be.



UK Release

Game: Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house
Genre: Platform
Release: January 1996
Players: 1
ROM size: 16 Mbit



Everything looks so cheerful! Even the hills are smiling… which belies the fact that the difficulty can be totally crushing.

GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?



The Super FX2 add-on chip was developed to give the humble SNES enough juice to produce 3D polygonal graphics. So it's ironic that the best and most innovative application of the tech appeared in the most defiantly 2D game Nintendo has ever made.

Yoshi's Island does include a few desultory 3D effects throughout, but you might not even notice them, so subtly have they been integrated into the game's hand-drawn cartoon world. From start to finish, *Yoshi's Island* emphasises a spectacular nursery-school graphical style. Heavy black outlines and messy scrawls of colour make for a game that gives the impression a toddler's wall graffiti has somehow come to life.

It's a fitting look, considering that Mario appears as a mere tyke here. Although Nintendo's moustached main man gets a few moments to himself (wherein he dashes about as a super-powered baby), *Yoshi's Island* really amounts to the most extraordinary escort mission ever. Players control Yoshi (a whole tribe of Yoshis, in fact) escorting an infant Mario back to his parents in Nintendo's final statement for the 16-bit era.

Really, it's less a statement than a deliberate middle finger to the trends and expectations of mid-'90s 2D platformers. *Sonic*'s Blast Processing means platformers gotta go fast? Here's a methodically paced game in which carefully lining up projectiles and sniffing out secrets rules the day. *Donkey Kong Country*'s fake-3D pre-rendering is the hot look for games? Here's an entire world that looks to have been scribbled in markers and crayons.

Underneath its quirky graphics, *Yoshi's Island* offers a fascinating, inventive take on the *Mario* concept. It makes clever use of the Super FX2 chip, scaling, stretching, spinning and distorting everything in sight to create never-before-seen challenges and game scenarios. The action's methodical pace helps you appreciate how vibrant and alive the world feels. Created at the dawn of 3D gaming, *Yoshi's Island* proves that the classic approach still had plenty of life. Its wobbly, secret-laden world is every bit as engrossing now as it was 21 years ago.

● Jeremy Parish

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
92%	80%	92%
GAMELIFE	OVERALL SCORE:	93%
89%		

VERDICT: Eleven years after *Super Mario Bros* defined the 2D platformer, *Yoshi's Island* proved cutting-edge tech could open new horizons for 'dated' genres. The result holds up brilliantly today.

ORIGINAL SCORE	SP36 94%

SPRITE AND SHADE

As the first game to use the new Super FX2 chip, you might have expected a lot more 3D. But *Yoshi's Island* used the add-on's power for pumping out screen-filling sprites…

Nintendo originally experimented with pre-rendered CGI graphics, but quickly decided to go a different direction. The few relics of these experiments, seen primarily in story sequences, suggest that our eyeballs dodged a bullet.





Instead of slick computer renderings, *Yoshi's Island* has been scrawled with childish strokes. The superficial crudity of the graphics belies their visual sophistication, though: just look at the pro-level lighting and shading on those distant hills!

With the boys reunited at last, Baby Mario and his little brother allow us to bear witness to a sight unseen anywhere else in the *Mario* universe: actual tangible proof that these two characters have real, live parents.





The advanced Super FX2 chip – developed by UK company Argonaut – barely gets to do any 3D maths. Instead, it's given to more surprising applications, like the drunken screen wobble inflicted by floating puffballs in 'Touch Fuzzy, Get Dizzy'.

Bosses always take the form of normal enemies inflated to brobdingnagian proportions, each with its own surprising twist – such as Raphael the Raven, who has his very own planetoid (more than a decade before *Super Mario Galaxy*).





Sometimes, super-sized enemies aren't bosses, merely reasons to panic. The giant Chain Chomps, which pursue Yoshi relentlessly through hazard-packed courses, will likely make players rue the very concept of the Super FX.



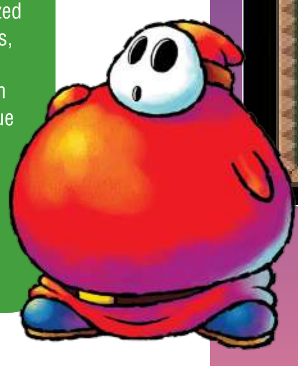
Left: *Yoshi's Island* puts surprising spins on old standards. Like, who even knew that Wigglers have a lifecycle and moult into butterflies?!



Below: Magikoopa from *Super Mario World* graduate to a leading role. The primary villain is Kamek, clearly the most ambitious of his species.







MODE 7 TIPS

If *Donkey Kong Country* standardised the idea of exhaustive item-collecting in platformers, *Yoshi's Island* proved acquisition can be good for something besides scratching obsessive-compulsive urges. Acquiring five flowers, 30 stars and 20 red coins in every level of a world will unlock entire new stages – each containing expert-level challenges to test the skills of even the most confident player.



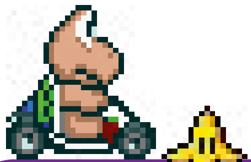
Yoshi's Island eases the burden of collecting with subtle cues, such as a faint colour cast on the hidden red coins.

SUPER MARIO KART

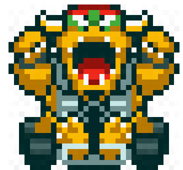




Does Nintendo's pioneering arcade racer stand up to modern scrutiny, or spin off into oblivion?



The feather is easily one of the most useful items, and essential for the best shortcuts. There are also plenty of corner-cutting opportunities, as long as you've got a mushroom to hand.



UK Release

Game: Super Mario Kart
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo EAD
Genre: Racing
Release: August 1992
Players: 1–2 simultaneously
ROM size: 0.5 Mbit



Right: Circuits are much shorter and snappier than in later entries, leading to more lapping of stragglers.



Above: The map on the lower half of the screen is a huge help, and a reminder of Nintendo's affection for two separate displays.

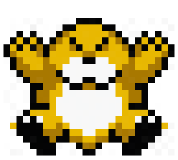
MODE 7 TIPS





- **Looking to make things tougher? Hold Y and press A when choosing your character and they'll shrink as if they'd gobbled a poison mushroom. Give other racers a wide berth to avoid being squashed.**
- **If winning gold in the Mushroom, Flower and Star cups is too much work, go to Time Trial or 2P Match Race, put the cursor on Mushroom Cup and press Left, Right, Left, Right, Left, Left, Right, Right, A to unlock the Special Cup.**

If you're finding it too tough in shrunken form, picking up another poison mushroom will return you to normal size.



GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?



It seemed a preposterous idea at the time. The platforming plumber in a kart racer? Of course, it turned out to be one of Nintendo's smartest decisions.

The original is still considered in some quarters to be the connoisseur's choice, stripped down to its essentials, and not without reason. Sure, you miss the razzle-dazzle of the latest edition, but *SMK* is an arcade racer in which you need to take your foot off the gas from time to time, where you can't rely on drifts and corner turbos to get by. Its tracks are narrow enough for almighty scrums on corners, and a banana in the middle causes panic rather being easily swerved past.

In other respects, it's showing its age. Dare we say it's not much to look at these days, particularly the murky Choco Island stages? And the view that it's a fairer game than the mayhem of more recent entries is proved rose-tinted by rubber-banding and item-spamming CPU racers. A few track designs are decidedly creaky, too, the ice blocks strewn across Vanilla Lake a particularly pointless irritant.

Others, however, are all-time greats. The dreaded right-angles of the Bowser Castle tracks make them as tough as they are unforgettable. The barrier-free Ghost Valley tracks are the ultimate white-knuckle time-trial courses, imposing in theme and design. And the beautiful Donut Plains 3, a track surely designed around that genre-defining hop-and-drift, is still a dazzler, justly revived for Wii U and Switch. A quarter-century on, it may no longer be the best, but it certainly remains a super *Mario Kart*.

● Chris Schilling

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
70%	85%	88%
GAMELIFE 84%	OVERALL SCORE:	87%

VERDICT: Compact, lean and ultra-satisfying, the original's highlights are a match for any of its successors. And there's not a blue shell in sight.

ORIGINAL SCORE | SP1 93%



Inset: There's something almost claymation-like about the game's visual style. Every character and enemy is cute and squat.

UK Release

Game: Super Mario RPG: Legend Of The Seven Stars
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Square
Genre: RPG
Release: N/A
Players: 1
ROM size: 32 Mbit

SUPER MARIO RPG



A collaboration between Square and Nintendo resulted in one of the most charismatic games on the SNES.

Super Mario RPG begins the way most *Mario* games end: with a face-off against Bowser.



MODE 7 TIPS

■ **Adding to *Super Mario RPG*'s dreamlike qualities are the extraordinarily well-hidden secrets squirreled away in its world. There's a casino, a hidden superboss, even a *Space Invaders* mini-game starring a beetle.**

■ **The Mushroom Boy's shop is glitched. He's supposed to only accept hard-won forest mushrooms, but you can get them from the Mole Lady next door instead.**

The most famous secret, a hidden boss named Culex, is a kind of demonic parody of *Final Fantasy* bosses – the battle music even comes from *Final Fantasy IV*.





GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?



For many, this will be among the most exciting games in the SNES Mini collection, since *Super Mario RPG* wasn't officially released in Europe the first time around. As a result, British children reading or hearing about it in the '90s could never be 100% sure that it wasn't completely made-up. A Square-made RPG starring the eccentric *Mario* cast? In which Mario actually fights with Bowser? Really?

There is still a subversive, almost dreamlike feel to *Super Mario RPG*, which fleshes out the abstract Mushroom Kingdom into a still-beautiful isometric JRPG world of Yoshis, Toads, Moles and sentient clouds. It is the funniest of any of the *Mario* games, bar perhaps *Thousand Year Door*. Bowser is reduced to a raving blowhard as his minions desert him; mute Mario relies on wild facial expressions, hand gestures and impersonations to communicate in a world of verbose NPCs; and guilt-ridden Goombas live out their lives in a town inhabited exclusively by reformed monsters. Unlike some other RPGs of its time, it's also snappy and fun to play, thanks to a battle system that melds turn-based combat with more traditional *Mario*-esque action. It gives every fight (even the super-easy ones) a frisson of excitement, as you try to time your attacks to earn an extra swing of Mario's hammer or smack of Princess Toadstool's glove.

Also brilliant: there are no random battles. Exploring isn't a teeth-gritting chore, which is great because there is so much to discover. The cute dialogue and abundant platformy secrets reward the smart and curious player. *Super Mario RPG* is legendary for its esoteric secrets, which are thankfully a lot easier to track down in the age of YouTube.

What's really appealing about *Super Mario RPG*, though, is the amount of amusing scenarios and random minigames and in-jokes and cameos it scatters before you: anyone with any love for Mario will find so much here to savour. Square approached Mario's first RPG with abundant creativity and good humour, and the collaboration with Nintendo is evident in its absolute mastery of the SNES hardware.

● Keza McDonald

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
82%	86%	80%
GAMELIFE 79%	OVERALL SCORE:	80%

VERDICT: The Mushroom Kingdom approached with wry wit and a fresh eye. There's almost nothing to dislike about this mash-up.

ORIGINAL SCORE SP44 81%



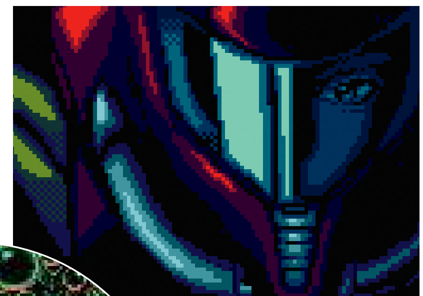
SUPER METROID

Exploratory platforming refined to perfection in a sequel truly deserving of the 'super' appellation.

UK Release

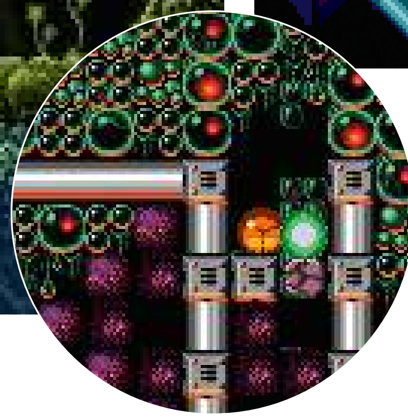
Game: Super Metroid
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: In-house
Genre: Action adventure
Release: July 1994
Players: 1
ROM size: 24 Mbit

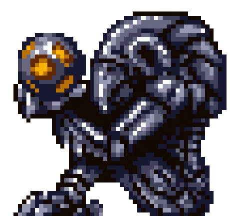




Above: The game carries over plenty of imagery from previous entries in Nintendo's series.







You had to activate two statues by killing bosses in order to complete *Metroid*; *Super Metroid* confronts you with four early on.

GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?



Some games manage to be greater than the sum of their parts. Consider *Super Metroid*. It isn't the best-looking 16-bit game. It doesn't have the best music. The controls feel a little too floaty for their own good. The game's few difficult combat encounters become easy once you figure out the secret to cheesing them. Yet somehow this imperfect collection of attributes has had a far greater influence on games and game creators than anything else that was released on the SNES.

Super Metroid excels through the brilliance with which its disparate pieces hang together. Director Yoshio Sakamoto's magnum opus offers an incredible study in structure, and in the importance of details. *Super Metroid* remains memorable (and wholly imitable) more than two decades after its debut for the flawless way in which it marries an exploratory trip through a meticulously arranged underground labyrinth to the sort of thoughtful minor details that would win Kojima's games such devotion a generation or two later.

The game oozes with brooding atmosphere, something 16-bit games don't often do well. The muted analogue sampling that defined the Super NES's audio capabilities gets a workout here, playing out with eerie sounds and ominous refrains that simply wouldn't have worked with more traditional chiptunes. It's a dark, lonely game full of ghosts, where the threat of marauding space pirates never seems quite so unnerving as the constant sensation that heroine Samus Aran isn't quite so alone as she seems.

Samus' quest takes her through the ruins of the NES game (left in a sorry state by the time bomb she herself triggered at the end of the first *Metroid*) and far beyond. Mother Brain's old lair offers plenty of new ground to explore, including a series of submerged caverns and a wrecked starship whose flickering screens suggest it was the accidental cause of planet Zebes' metroid infestation – another of the series' many nods to Alien. All of these things are good and interesting, but ultimately *Super Metroid*'s greatest gift to us all comes from its intricate, interlocking world design, which turns out to be equally engrossing when transplanted into indie brawlers like *Gaucamelee* or grim RPGs like *Dark Souls*.

● Jeremy Parish

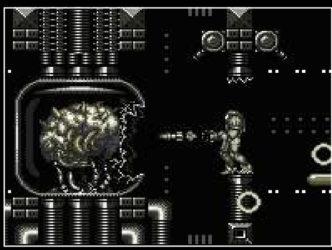
GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
82%	90%	94%
GAMELIFE	OVERALL SCORE:	94%
90%		

VERDICT: A haunting adventure that takes hold and will not let go, *Super Metroid* still stands tall as one of gaming's landmark titles.

ORIGINAL SCORE	SP20 92%

A TALE IN SILENCE

One of *Super Metroid*'s greatest accomplishments is to tell a complete story with very few words. Once you make it through the introductory text scroll (which mostly recaps the first two games), it's all pantomime from there on.



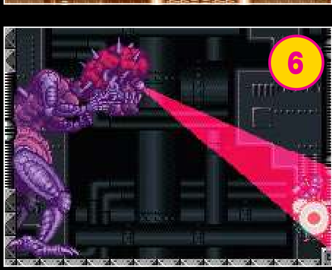














Left: Clever boss designs force you to change tactics throughout the adventure. Below: While the Space Jump power eventually makes it obsolete, Samus' grappling hook still comes in handy…



1. The first few minutes of the game take place in an isolated space colony where scientists hope to learn more about the baby metroid Samus recovered in *Metroid II*.
2. The interior of the colony shows off the game's silent narrative at its best. This is the third time players see this room – it shows up on the title screen, where the researchers lay dead and a central platform holds the baby metroid. Now, the metroid is absent, setting the plot into motion.
3. Once you reach planet Zebes, you retrace your steps through familiar locations from the original *Metroid*. This time, however, you don't encounter any enemies within the ruins. Instead, eerie surveillance devices trace Samus' every step, building an intense sensation of dread.
4. While you don't meet metroids until the end of the game, you encounter little hints of the space pirates' ambitions for the baby throughout the game. These weak, simplistic metroid clones – moctroids – pose little real threat, but can certainly freak out experienced *Metroid* fans.
5. Some players may have been disappointed to find that the end of *Super Metroid* played out largely the same as the original game, all the way down to Mother Brain's chamber full of tubes and rings of fire. But the point was to soften them up for (warning: spoilers ahead)…
6. …the big twist, which begins with Mother Brain showing off her new combat gear and ends with an intense climax that brings the story full circle and results in Samus essentially turning into a tiny armoured god of destruction.

ARAN AGAIN (NATURALLY)



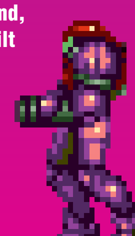








While *Super Metroid* spends most of its running time doing its own thing, the ghosts of its predecessors are never too far away. The game deliberately builds off Samus's first two adventures, sometimes to create texture, sometimes to knock players off their feet. The main game begins with a reverse trip through the escape shaft from the NES finale, which takes you past the shattered remains of Mother Brain's lair. On the other hand, your rematch with Kraid finds the dopey little lizard rebuilt into a multi-screen titan…



A shared setting with *Metroid II* sees elements return, such as the Spring Ball, while the NES game's nastiest gimmicks, such as trick floors, show up unchanged.

SUPER PUNCH-OUT!!



Nintendo's belated arcade port delivers a one-two punch of character and challenge.

The graceful pirouette before Bear Hugger (right) collapses is one of many brilliant animations. Once you've learned to read an opponent, you can finish a match off within half a minute.





Left: It's not exactly Queensbury rules, as Dragon Chan's kung-fu approach illustrates.

UK Release

Game: Super Punch-Out!!
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo IRD
Genre: Fighting
Release: January 1995
Players: 1
ROM size: 2 Mbit

MODE 7 TIPS

- You can KO Piston Hurricane in less than ten seconds: simply hit him with consecutive lefts to the face, then a super-punch to the gut when he's stunned. Release a second super-punch when he rises, and he's done for.
- If you've won the Minor, Major and World circuits four-nil, you can unlock the Special Circuit.
- Mash the buttons while your rival's down and you'll recover some stamina.





Like many *Super Punch-Out!!* opponents, Piston Hurricane presents a stern test until you figure out his weaknesses.







GOOD, BAD OR UGLY?



To think we complain about delays of mere weeks. After the success of arcade *Punch-Out!!*, Nintendo rushed out a sequel in less than a year. It was in rather less of a hurry to bring it to consoles. *Punch-Out!!* reached the NES in a mere three years; SNES players had to wait a full decade for *Super Punch-Out!!* to arrive.

Like many SNES games, it's about refinement rather than reinvention. You face a cavalcade of cartoon stereotypes that would be outrageous if they weren't so absurd, and the fun's in figuring out how to read their fighting styles before giving them a faceful of glove. Land enough successive shots and you'll build up your Super meter, letting you launch winding gut punches, meaty uppercuts and left-right-left flurries to leave your adversaries in a daze.

Opponents hit hard enough that a single mistimed duck can be enough to send you sprawling to the canvas. And they're as likely to put you off with their facial expressions as their dodges and feints: just try not to laugh at Bald Bull's surprised response to taking one in the breadbasket. But with sharp reflexes and a keen eye for recognising tells, you'll eventually conquer all four circuits – at which point the challenge shifts to knocking your opponent out in the fastest possible time, and bouts are measured in seconds, not minutes. Its spirit lives on in the behind-the-fighter perspective and larger-than-life characters of *ARMS* – other SNES hits may have aged better, but this is still thumpingly good fun.

● Chris Schilling

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
83%	66%	79%
GAMELIFE 82%	OVERALL SCORE:	78%

VERDICT: Cartoonish looks belie a tough test of reflexes and pattern recognition in an entertaining brawler that comfortably KOs its arcade inspiration.

ORIGINAL SCORE SP27 90%

WIN WIN WIN!

SOME OF THE FINEST SNES-RELATED STUFF THE GALAXY HAS EVER SEEN!



A CLASSIC MINI: SNES

You know how sometimes you look at a puppy or even a small child and it's so cute that you have a weird animalistic impulse to just pick it up and *bite* it? You'll get that when you pick this thing up for the first time. It also plays some extremely fine games, as you well know.



A McCLOUD'S ARWING ACADEMY T-SHIRT

What other T-shirt could we pick for an issue with the hero at the centre of *Star Fox* on the cover? This one comes from our pals at **www.gamerprint.co.uk**, and is worth £20. It's available in small, medium, large, XL and XXL, but let's get into that if you win it, eh?



A CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WARS VINYL LP

From the master curators at **mondotees.com**, this is a glorious celebration of one of Konami's most stirring game soundtracks. It's worth $25 and will look great on your shelf whether you're a hardcore game-music collector or you smell faintly of damp and are really into Jethro Tull.



AN ORIGINAL, SIGNED PIECE OF WIL OVERTON ART

Hand-painted on celluloid by *Super Play*'s very own illustrator extraordinaire, this artwork was once used as the basis for the cover of issue 25, marking the UK release of *Secret Of Mana*. And now you can own it! Put it in a frame and stick it on your wall (or eBay – we don't mind).



A SUPER FAMICOM: THE BOX ART COLLECTION BOOK

We didn't just import SFC games from Japan to get them ahead of their official UK release; we also did it because of their unique cover artwork. This sumptuous 276-page celebration of the form from **www.bitmapbooks.co.uk** is worth £24.99, and rarely fails to make us giddy.

HOW TO ENTER

To enter, answer this question correctly:
Which Nintendo designer was responsible for the creation of the Game & Watch series?

Email your answer to superplaycompo@gmail.com
On the closing date, 5 October 2017, all correct responses will enter a draw, and winners will be selected at random, each picking up one of the five prizes on this page, also selected at random. Winners will be notified, much less randomly, by email. **Good luck!**

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IMPORT REVIEWS

By Damien McFerran



If you're an especially devoted Nintendo collector, you may be hankering after Nintendo's Mini hardware in its Japanese format. Just for you, we've rounded up the five games exclusive to the Super Famicom edition.



Above: As with the western versions, Nintendo has riffed on its original packaging for the Super Famicom Mini. Mmm, exotic console boxes…

FIRE EMBLEM: Mystery Of The Emblem

INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS 1994

Fire Emblem may be a household name in the west today, but back in the early 1990s it was almost unknown – the first entry to be officially localised outside Japan was on the Game Boy Advance in 2003. *Mystery Of The Emblem* marked the debut of the franchise on the Super Famicom, with the previous two instalments being Famicom releases from 1990 (*Shadow Dragon And The Blade Of Light*) and 1992 (*Gaiden*) respectively. This 16-bit release actually serves as a remake of the earliest title; the first portion of the game retells the original game's storyline while the second is a chronological sequel. Following Marth's victory, his old ally Hardin becomes king of the now-peaceful Archanea, but his unchecked military expansion causes friction between the two erstwhile friends, and Marth must choose to ride into battle. Following the reduced strategic focus seen in *Fire Emblem Gaiden* – a title from 1992 which divides fans of the series even to this day – *Mystery Of The Emblem* marked a return to the more traditional gameplay seen in the first game. Units are moved around a grid-based map, with combat taking place in short animated sequences which show blows being exchanged between fighters. Experience points are dished out for success in battle, and characters can change classes when they attain a certain level. Regarded as one of the best entries in the entire series, *Mystery Of The Emblem* is a fine addition to the Super Famicom Mini software line-up.

SCORE 90%



GANBARE GOEMON: Yukihime Kyūshutsu Emaki

KONAMI 1991

Known in the west as *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja*, *Ganbare Goemon: Yukihime Kyūshutsu Emaki* is yet another example of Konami's willingness to experiment with traditional gaming concepts. The game is divided into two sections: in towns, you can buy items, gather information and play mini-games (level one of *Gradius* is included, for example), while the side-scrolling platforming levels feature a host of enemies and boss characters to take down. Fusing these two styles together keeps things fresh, and despite being a very early Super Famicom release, it's blessed with gorgeous visuals and some nice Mode 7 effects. *Goemon*'s simultaneous two-player mode is also a little different from the norm: one player can ride on the shoulders of the other, the uppermost character dishing out attacks while the other controls movement. Upgradable attacks give the game an RPG feel, and there are different weapons and items to obtain during your quest. Despite the unanimous critical acclaim it received from the western gaming press upon release, *Ganbare Goemon* is the only Super Famicom instalment in the series to see a release outside of its native Japan; its equally superb sequels were never localised for western launch, making this perhaps the most internationally renowned entry. While subsequent games undoubtedly refined and improved the core mechanics, *Ganbare Goemon: Yukihime Kyushutsu Emaki* remains a solid-gold classic, and is reason enough to consider importing a Super Famicom Mini from Japan.

SCORE 91%









PANEL DE PON

INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS 1995

This 1995 puzzle title from *Fire Emblem* studio Intelligent Systems may not be especially familiar to western SNES fans, but they will almost certainly recognise its localised title of *Tetris Attack*. That version stripped out all of the cute fairies seen in the Japanese original and replaced them with characters from the *Super Mario* universe. Despite the presence of 'Tetris' in the title, the game actually has nothing to do with Alexey Pajitnov's seminal line-clearing classic. Instead, the objective is to remove a series of coloured blocks by matching them in horizontal or vertical lines of three or more. The catch is that you're limited to switching blocks two at a time, and you can move them only horizontally. *Panel De Pon* showcases a Story Mode which guides the player through the game's plot, while Endless Mode tasks you with staying alive for as long as possible as the screen fills with blocks. A Timed Mode sets a two-minute limit in which you have to rack up as many points as possible, while Stage Clear mode gives you a set line to drop the level of blocks down to. Finally, a Puzzle Mode presents you with a screen packed with blocks, asking you to remove them all within a certain number of moves. *Panel De Pon*'s gameplay would later be combined with Pokémon characters for games on the Game Boy Color and N64, but it has since gained its own identity in the west, where it is now known as *Puzzle League*. The SNES landscape is hardly short of puzzle games, but this is one of the most accomplished examples.

SCORE 91%



SUPER FORMATION SOCCER

HUMAN 1991

It's easy to see why *Super Formation Soccer* made such an impact when it launched on the Super Famicom way back in 1991; the sport of football was really beginning to catch on in Japan thanks to an explosion of interest in the domestic J-League, and the game's unique visuals – which use Mode 7 to create the impression of perspective on the smoothly scaling pitch – ensured it was comfortably the most visually alluring soccer game of its time. However, like so many early Japanese-made representations of the world's favourite sport, *Super Formation Soccer* stumbles when it comes to the essentials. The ball pings around the pitch like a hyperactive bumble bee, rarely spending any time on the deck. Keeping possession feels like something of a chore thanks to the rather crude passing mechanics, and the pretty Mode 7 visuals mean that when you're playing down the pitch you can't actually see your own players, making it almost impossible to stroke the ball around confidently and make best use of your teammates. It's often more sensible to simply dribble the ball from one end of the pitch to the other and score, since trying to involve other players almost always ends in intercepted passes or a tiresome game of long-ball ping-pong. Renamed *Super Soccer* and released alongside the SNES in the west, this title may have nostalgic value but there are much better football games on Nintendo's 16-bit console – we'd rather have seen *International Superstar Soccer Deluxe* / *Jikkyou World Soccer 2: Fighting Eleven* make the Mini cut instead.

SCORE 54%



SUPER STREET FIGHTER II: The New Challengers

CAPCOM 1994

While European and North American SNES Classic Mini owners get *Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting*, in Japan the Super Famicom Mini is shipping with the next title in the series, *Super Street Fighter II*. On the surface this might seem like a clear win, but there are some points to consider here. *Super Street Fighter II* on Nintendo's home console isn't capable of hitting the insane speeds witnessed in *Street Fighter II Turbo* – that would have to wait until *Super Street Fighter II Turbo*, which launched in arcades soon afterwards – and it lacks the super specials from that title, as well as additional character Akuma (Gouki in Japan). That version was never released on the SNES, and as a result fans of the franchise often feel torn between these two editions. While *Super Street Fighter II* is a bit slower than its direct forerunner, it's still faster than the original arcade version thanks to various speed settings which can be selected from the title screen. It's also a much more handsome title than *Street Fighter II Turbo* – the new backgrounds are incredible, and the multiple colour options for each fighter give the game a brighter, more eye-catching look. New modes include Group Battle and Time Challenge, and the epic eight-player Tournament mode from the arcade version also makes the cut. Both games fall short when judged against modern entries in the series, but *Super Street Fighter II* looks and sounds great, and having those four extra characters makes a considerable difference.

SCORE 85%



SNES MINI II FANTASY EDITION

WHAT CART?

KEY

- **PZ** Puzzle
- **F** Fighting
- **S** Shoot-'em-up
- **P** Platform
- **ST** Strategy
- **SP** Sport
- **SB** Scrolling Beat-'em-up
- **A** Action
- **R** RPG
- **AR** Action RPG
- **RA** Racing

Which 16-bit hits slipped down the back of Nintendo's sofa when it was compiling the SNES Mini line-up?

In an ideal world, Nintendo will be inspired by the hunger for its newest retro console and make a SNES Mini MkII, populating it with this list of 21 titles. However, since our existence plays out on an orb advancing towards nuclear oblivion at terrifying, face-contorting velocity, please use this merely as a guide to some more great SNES games you should play if you missed them the first time.



ACTRAISER

A/ST — Quintet, 1990 — SP2 90%

When a developer combines two gameplay styles the results are often less than satisfying, but *ActRaiser* is proof that it's possible. Action-platforming mixes with *Populous*-style segments in which you help your worshippers to thrive. Yuzo Koshiro's soundtrack is the cherry on top.



AXELAY

S — Konami, 1992 — SP2 85%

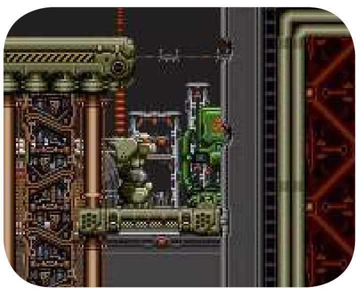
One of the best shooters on the SNES, *Axelay* is Konami at the height of its 16-bit powers. Not only is it a technical showcase for the developer – who could forget that rolling horizon and abundance of Mode 7? – but it boasts amazing music and tight, engaging gameplay to boot.



CHRONO TRIGGER

R — Square, 1995 — SP37 90%

One of the finest JRPGs in existence, *Chrono Trigger* has all the hallmarks of a Square classic, but goes the extra mile with an epic time-travelling storyline. Created by a dream team of Hironobu Sakaguchi (*Final Fantasy*), Yuji Horii (*Dragon Quest*) and Akira Toriyama (*Dragon Ball*), this is a stunner.



CYBERNATOR

A — Konami, 1992 — SP5 91%

Japan's preoccupation with massive robots has resulted in some fine videogames, with *Cybernator* (known in its homeland as *Assault Suits Valken*) one of the most notable. The main sprite feels heavy and powerful, and despite its sluggish nature the game is consistently thrilling.



DEMON'S CREST

A — Capcom, 1994 — SP27 80%

A side-story in Capcom's *Ghosts'n Goblins* series, *Demon's Crest* (or *Blazon*) places you in the role of Firebrand, an enemy from *G'nG* and the star of the *Gargoyle's Quest* sub-series on the Game Boy and NES. Great visuals and interesting RPG elements are in abundance – this is vintage Capcom.



DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 3

P — Rare, 1996 — N/A

Released too late to gain the attention it deserved, *Donkey Kong Country 3* is perhaps the most robust entry in the series, bringing with it a larger, less linear world map and refined SGI-rendered visuals. This is a fine – if somewhat under-appreciated – swansong for the series on the SNES.



DOREMI FANTASY

P — Hudson Soft, 1996 — N/A

A sequel of sorts to much-loved NES title *Milon's Secret Castle*, *DoReMi Fantasy* was released exclusively in Japan towards the end of the Super Famicom's life. A cute platform adventure with a musical theme, it tasks Milon with finding a series of magical instruments in order to save his friend.



KIRBY'S AVALANCHE

PZ — HAL Laboratory, 1995 — SP33 91%

Despite the inclusion of everyone's favourite pink ball of air, this is in actual fact the western release of *Super Puyo Puyo*, the Compile puzzler whose objective is to link up like-hued blobs and rain on your opponent's efforts. Two-player matches make this one of the best puzzle titles on the SNES.



NBA JAM: TE

SP — Acclaim, 1994 — SP30 90%

While it boasts official teams and players from the early-'90s NBA league, this sports title doesn't take itself too seriously. Players can leap many feet into the air for dunks, and when they're on a roll they can shoot flaming basketballs for additional impact. Boomshakalaka, indeed.

INDEPENDENT SUPER NINTENDO MAGAZINE Super Play

TOP STRATEGY



ST Ogre Battle: March Of The Black Queen

Quest, 1993 **SP34 80%**

An ancestor of acclaimed 1997 PlayStation release *Final Fantasy Tactics*, *Ogre Battle* mixes real-time tactics with RPG-style character development and progression set in a medieval fantasy world. Fact: the unique title is inspired by two songs from the rock band Queen, both from the 1974 album Queen II.

"The scenario is compelling, and it's surprisingly friendly." SP34



SP PILOTWINGS

Nintendo, 1990 **SP1 92%**

Alongside *F-Zero*, *Pilotwings* was the game that truly sold the possibilities of Mode 7. It's hard to imagine it being as effective without those rotating and scaling landscapes, and the game makes a welcome change from the hordes of platformers, racers, RPGs and action titles in the SNES library.



S R-TYPE III

Irem, 1993 **SP16 83%**

The SNES wasn't inundated with shooters like the Mega Drive and PC Engine, but what it lacks in quantity it makes up for in quality – as *R-Type III* comprehensively proves. This console-exclusive release harnesses Mode 7 for some eye-catching effects, but there are plenty of fresh ideas as well.



AR SHADOWRUN

Beam Software, 1993 **SP10 85%**

Based on the popular tabletop game of the same name, *Shadowrun* mixes the world of Blade Runner with RPG tropes such as magic and monsters. Blessed with an engaging storyline, challenging combat system and a massive, believable game world, this is a cult classic.



F STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 2

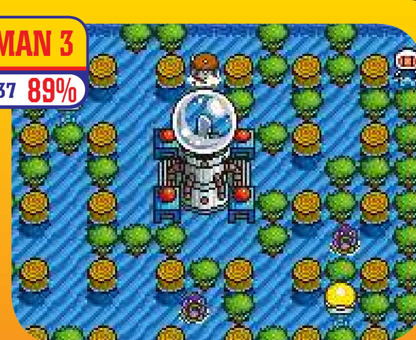
Capcom, 1996 **N/A**

The last *Street Fighter* title to reach the SNES, *Alpha 2* is a stunning technical achievement. Compared to newer console versions it's a scaled-down affair, but the gameplay has survived intact. All of the characters are present and correct, replete with their killer moves and specials.

A/PZ SUPER BOMBERMAN 3

Hudson Soft, 1995 **SP37 89%**

Hudson Soft would release five mainline *Bomberman* games on Nintendo's 16-bit system, and while all of them are worth a look, this is a definite highpoint. After the gimmicky additions of previous titles, *SB3* scales things back for a more streamlined and enjoyable experience, with a surprisingly excellent soundtrack.



AR TERRANIGMA

Quintet, 1996 **N/A**

Only released in Japan and Europe, this action RPG is something of a hidden gem. Like fellow Quintet titles *ActRaiser* and *Illusion Of Gaia*, *Terranigma* has a strong thematic focus on creation, evolution and resurrection, and is often hailed as the zenith of Quintet's work on Nintendo's 16-bit console.

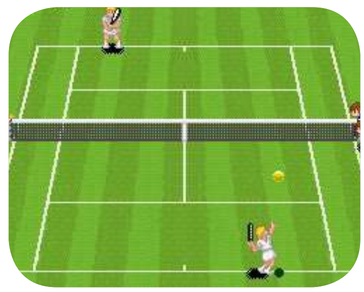




P SUPER MARIO ALL-STARS

Nintendo, 1993 **SP11 96%**

We're cheating a bit here as this is a collection of touched-up NES classics rather than a wholly original SNES title, but *All-Stars* remains eminently desirable as it features lovingly enhanced versions of *Super Mario Bros*, *Super Mario Bros* 2, *Super Mario Bros 3* and the made-for-Japan *Lost Levels*.



SP SUPER TENNIS

Tonkin House, 1991 **SP1 92%**

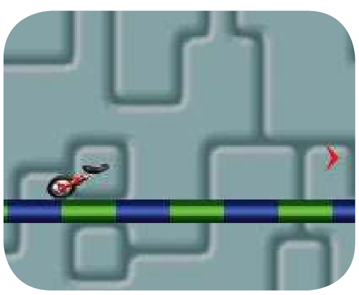
While more technically impressive tennis games have been released, this remains one of the finest virtual representations of the sport. Among the first to offer multiple shot types – each mapped to a face button – *Super Tennis* has an addictive solo career mode, but with two players it really shines.



SB TMNT: TURTLES IN TIME

Konami, 1992 **SP2 84%**

Turtles In Time was released at the height of TMNT stardom, and, like the iconic 1989 coin-op original, places our half-shelled heroes in a *Final Fight*-style scrolling beat-'em-up. Colourful visuals, excellent audio and exciting gameplay have ensured that this remains a fan favourite.



RA UNIRACERS

DMA Design, 1994 **SP29 85%**

Also known as *Unirally*, this unique racer might look rather basic in static screenshots, but in motion it's blisteringly swift. The stunt-based gameplay and two-player split-screen mode make for an absorbing and challenging title which has no real point of comparison on the SNES.

INDEPENDENT SUPER NINTENDO MAGAZINE Super Play

TOP COWPOKERY



S Wild Guns

Natsume, 1996 **SP24 87%**

Set in a Wild West where massive, gun-toting robots rub shoulders with irritable, square-jawed cowboys, Natsume's superb into-the-screen shooter has some of the best graphics on the console, but it's the deliciously hectic two-player co-op gameplay that really makes this an essential experience.

"It's an arcade-style game with no pretensions to be anything else." SP24


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